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THE USE OF RITUAL IN THE PASTORAL CARE AND SUPPORT OF FAMILIES

BY

RICHARD V. SIPE, JR.

THE DIVINITY SCHOOL

Date: May 26, 1993

Approved:

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Master of Theology in The Divinity School of Duke University

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Cynthia and Ken have just moved some 500 miles from their home of eleven years in rural western New York state to a bustling suburban area near a big city in Pennsylvania. They have two children in their early teens. The new house and neighborhood is okay, but the new location doesn't quite seem like home.

George and Mary are elated over the birth of a daughter, their second child, but they are not quite sure how three-year-old Jeff will welcome his new sister.

After ten years of physical abuse, Kathy has finally broken away from her husband, gained custody of their two children, and has just moved to an apartment in another state. She is feeling guilty for not being a "good" wife, is wondering how she will be accepted in her new church community, and is feeling scared and alone.

Margaret and Fred have been married for eight years and have been unable to have children despite repeated procedures at several different fertility clinics. After three years of waiting, a baby has become available for adoption. Margaret and Fred are both ecstatic and hesitant at the same time. They realize that this new life will change their pattern of living established over eight years of marriage. Their biggest concern, however is that the baby boy they are to adopt is biracial, and they are not sure if members of Fred's family of origin will treat them and the child differently as a result.

> When Rob was six, his sixteen-year-old sister, Jan, committed suicide by putting their father's target pistol in her mouth and pulling the trigger. Rob was considered too young to attend the funeral. Family members never mention Jan's name or discuss the details of the death even though the story was in the newspaper and most of the citizens of the small town remember the circumstances surrounding the death. Rob is now seventeen and becoming a discipline problem at Smith High School. His grades are slipping and he has already been suspended once.

All of these situations are familiar to the pastoral caregiver. They represent a small sampling of the crises and celebrations which occur in the life of every family. It is often difficult to ascertain just what type of pastoral care can be offered to families experiencing these and other life events.

The goal of this paper is to suggest some ways in which ritual can become a valuable tool in assessing and addressing both the difficult and celebrative situations that arise during a pastor's ministry with families. I will describe ways in which ritual in the home and the congregational setting can aid in the establishment and maintenance of healthy patterns of interaction within the family. This approach is consistent with family systems theory in that the use of ritual in the care of families recognizes that the family is a system and operates to a large degree in patterns. Some family patterns have been passed down through the generations. Ritual is a prime

contributor to family systems since it has the capacity to facilitate both stability and adaptation within systems. Ritual supports the continuance of systems and establishes their identity. I maintain that ritual is a tool pastors can use appropriately and successfully in the care and support of families. Ritual can be useful in preventive care as well as short and long-range counseling.

Understanding the dynamics involved in family rituals has implications for routine pastoral visitation of homes, ministering to families in crisis, conducting worship which is supportive of healthy family patterns, celebrating with families, and counseling families who may be crying for help.

Definitions

In order to profitably talk about the use of ritual in the care of families, there is a need first to delineate clearly the meaning of "family," "pastoral care," and "ritual." Included in the definition of ritual will be a discussion of the various characteristics of a ritual.

Many church and family rituals assume a traditional nuclear family structure despite the fact that there are now many single-parent families, elderly parents living with their married children, extended family members living under one roof, step families, and other non-traditional family

groupings. The pastoral caregiver needs to keep this great variety in mind as he or she seeks to minister to families.

Family

The definition of "family" for the sake of this study will be basically that of Jan Falloon and J. C. Wynn:

> [A family is] any combination of persons related by marriage, blood, adoption, or choice; and sharing in either the same address or the same lineage of origin (Wynn 1991, 20).
>
> [Families are] those individuals, whether biological relatives, members of the same household, or otherwise related, who are involved in interdependent close relationships (Falloon 1991, 69).

The family may include various members of the extended family and, under certain circumstances, even very close friends. This author is hesitant to recognize gay couples and those who live together as husband and wife without the commitment of marriage in the context of a consideration of pastoral care to families, since there is great controversy as to the ethical implications of supporting these particular relationships. Although secular family therapists and some pastoral counselors now include these groupings under the heading of "family," I do not consider it within the purview of the Christian pastor to support these particular family groupings.

Pastoral Care

Ralph Underwood has proposed an excellent definition of pastoral care:

> The ministry of pastoral care consists of service done by representative Christian persons, directed toward the celebrating, healing, sustaining, guiding, and reconciling of persons whose joys and troubles arise in the context of ultimate meanings (Underwood 1993, 16).

An integral part of pastoral care is the way in which worship is conducted, home visits are envisioned, and the organizational functioning of the congregation or church agency is structured. Pastoral care entails patterns and symbols as much as actions and words, and can be rendered by both ordained clergy and laypersons. Pastoral counseling falls under the general umbrella of pastoral care.

Ritual

It is essential that the pastor clearly understand what constitutes a ritual. Two definitions serve as good foundations for this understanding. The first is offered by Mara Selvini Palazzoli and associates:

> [A] family ritual refers to an action or a series of actions, sometimes accompanied by verbal formulas or expressions, that are to be carried out by all members of the family. The ritual is prescribed in every detail: the place in which it must be carried out, the time, any eventual number of repetitions, the persons who are to utter the verbal expressions and in what order, etc. (Palazzoli et al. 1977, 452)

Palazzoli's definition is extremely restrictive in that it states that all of the family members must be involved and that the details of enactment are spelled out and rigidly followed. Bossard and Bolls' (1950, 9) definition is similarly restrictive. In actuality, family rituals range from those which are extremely flexible and informal to those which are formal and rigid. There are some family rituals that have as a part of their function the exclusion of certain members of the family, and thus would not fall under Palazzoli's definition. Kenneth Mitchell's definition is more in line with the material presented in this paper:

> A ritual is: an ordered or patterned sequence of interpersonal behavior, often occurring in connection with a particular event or circumstance, performed in the same (or a very similar) way each time it occurs, sometimes embodying a reference to a historical event, and symbolizing--pointing beyond itself to --a value or belief commonly held by the individuals or groups who perform it (Mitchell 1989, 69).

Throughout this paper, the working definition of a family ritual will be: a formal or informal pattern of family interaction prescribed either by the family grouping, or by church or community tradition which takes place primarily within a special place and time designated for a particular observance. Rituals employ symbolic actions and/or objects to convey and bolster both obvious and hidden belief systems to participants and observers. Family

rituals are often repetitive, but may also include onetime occurrences in response to a particular family crisis or need.

No real distinction will be made between religious rites and secular rituals since both entail a sense of the transcendent and the holy. Christian rites employ the Word of God and invoke the presence of God instead of merely a general inference of transcendence as found in secular rituals.

Joan Laird (1990, 111-112) points out common characteristics of rituals that contribute to their power. Rituals are rarely chance happenings. They are more likely well prepared and practiced performances--repeated stylized drama engineered to convey a metaphoric message. The drama and repetitiveness carry the message in symbolic, often subconscious ways through patterns and imagery as much as through verbal content. Participants in the drama have assigned roles, and the action takes place in a particular type of location during a specified time frame. All of these characteristics work together to form a sort of living parable, painting a portrait of a family's values or beliefs, and drawing them into a cohesive group. Ironically, even those members of the family who are assigned the role of outsiders are a part of the system by being assigned to the role of outsider. Simple actions or objects are often endowed with much power because of the

images they represent as a result of a family ritual. A worn out ball glove; the rocking chair by the window; the Sunday paper; bread, water and wine--these common everyday objects can conjure up powerful images and memories. Through the repetition of symbolic actions, the family's identity is passed to the next generation. The reality of this drama is most evident when a symbol or person is missing. There is often general confusion and a deep sense of loss in the family following the death of a key player, or when a symbol such as the cabin by the lake is no longer available.

Because of their frequency, ordinariness and subtlety, the daily rituals of family life such as bedtime and mealtime can be most influential in shaping the way in which family members view their relationships. It becomes assumed that certain family members fulfill certain roles, not just in the immediate family, but in all families. It just seems right because that is the way it has been every day in my family (Bossard and Boll 1950, 16, 35-36). As J. C. Wynn points out:

> In most cases . . . we are barely conscious of the rituals we follow and are amazed at their detail when someone calls attention to what we have been doing (Wynn 1991, 43).

Family rituals are often developed in the beginning to respond to a particular situation such as the tragic death of one member or the celebration of a special Christmas when

everyone gathers at a particular spot. From that single occasion, a family tradition is born and then repeated over successive years or generations. Rituals are developed and modified to react to similar situations (Bossard and Boll 1950, 187). These repeated rituals tend to move from informal to formal, flexible to rigid, and from simple to more complex (Bossard and Boll 1950, 16). Because of this tendency to develop into a rigid formal system of actions, there is the potential for family rituals to limit the family's adaptability to sudden changes and new challenges. Members may feel obligated to follow rituals which no longer have much meaning or purpose:

> Family rituals, because they are a crystalized judgment from family experience, define the way to do things under all circumstances, and particularly in respect to the common occurrences of daily family life (Bossard and Boll 1950, 58).

Bossard and Boll were prophetic concerning their description of the developing trends in family ritual. Even though they were writing in the late 1940's, their descriptions fit today's families:

> [Families today are] (a) more secular and simple; (b) more intimate and less public; (c) less traditional . . . (d) less repressively and autocratically prescribed; (e) more frequently of the consciously constructed and adjusted type; (f) more narrowly restricted in number and scope; and (g) more personalized to particular family groups (Bossard and Boll 1950, 29).

Despite these trends, I believe there is a new yearning for symbol, image, cohesion, direction and meaning, and thus for

ritual. Ironically, this yearning comes at a time of increasing economic and social pressure on the family--a time of outside forces which make it difficult for family members to meet together, thus precluding the possibility of meaningful ritual. As a result, the rift grows ever wider in spiraling fashion between family members, and between nuclear family and extended family.

Neglect of Ritual

Until the recent past, there has been a neglect of ritual life in the family. Not until very recent years has there been a serious interest concerning the therapeutic value inherent in family rituals. Kenneth Mitchell makes the revealing comment that: "Until about fifty years ago . . . pastoral care was expressed more often than not, in ritualized forms" (Mitchell 1989, 68). That interest was abandoned because of the pastoral care profession's fascination with psychological theories.

While a variety of Christian churches--including Methodist, Lutheran, Greek Orthodox, and Roman Catholic--have published prayer books containing blessings and rituals for almost every occasion relevant to home and family, these rich treasures are rarely utilized. In response to my request for an interview concerning the use of ritual in the care of families, one Roman Catholic priest responded, "I really don't use ritual in counseling couples or families.

Sometimes I end with a prayer." His response was a real surprise to me since the Roman Catholic Church has a highly developed history of ritual. A Baptist minister responded in an incredulous tone, "We don't do ritual." A Jewish rabbi and Lutheran minister eagerly consented to a discussion of family rituals. It was obvious from the ensuing interviews that the rabbi and the Lutheran minister were both aware of the power of ritual in the support of families. Being a Lutheran minister myself, I suspect that the use of ritual for the care and counseling of families is not a churchwide phenomenon.

The responses I received from various ministers suggest that many pastoral caregivers are not only unaware of the power of ritual in the care of families, but are unaware of the connection between religious ritual, relational rituals, family myths and bringing healing to families. I believe that pastoral caregivers are selling short one of the Church's richest treasures, while many family systems experts are adept in the language of ritual and recognize its value in the practice of counseling families. In Pastoral Care and the Means of Grace, Ralph Underwood (1993, 65, 71-72) comments that the ritual of private confession and absolution for individuals or families is rarely utilized by protestant pastors. Instead, they are content with limiting confession to the general form that is a part of Sunday worship. Could it be that pastors today

are too caught up in trying to figure out the psychological implications and diagnoses involved in family interactions to acknowledge the power of sacrament and ritual? Underwood goes on to charge: "Lutheran use of absolution in the context of personal confession is so limited that it appears to be a practice reserved for exceptional cases" (Underwood 1993, 73).

Victor Turner has an interesting hypothesis about the relatively few religious symbols used in the United States. He asserts that the Puritans and other religious groups which fled to the United States purposely rejected any symbolic ties to the European communities they had left in search of religious freedom. According to Turner, religion was then internalized and the emphasis became the spoken word rather than the visible symbol. He states that visual objects which represent our dreams and troubles are needed for social health. Rituals are the vehicles of those symbols (Turner 1982, 13-14).

Underwood and Mitchell lament clergy's loss of ritual:

> "Thoroughly modern" ministers . . . . whether conservative or liberal, Baptist or Episcopalian--are likely to have little or no expectation concerning this ordinance [the Eucharist] or sacrament. For them, rituals and symbols do not have any inherent power or "virtue." They can, of course, serve as graphic aids to the sermonic moment or as expressions of human caring and acceptance, which these ministers believe God does use. But as an aspect of . . . ministry, the Eucharist has at best a supplemental or tangential role (Underwood 1993, 118).

> Perhaps some of the contemporary impatience with ritual is a justified reaction to the poor quality of much of the ritual in which we are constrained to participate (Mitchell 1977, 117).

> In religious practice, in pastoral care theory, and especially in Clinical Pastoral Education, there has grown up an insistence that ritual ignores the particular in favor of the general, and that the use of rituals permits ministers to avoid dealing with difficult interpersonal situations (Mitchell 1977, 68).

Clergy in general have lost their traditional connection with ritual and symbol, tools of the profession which should be utilized with ease. The goal of this thesis is to "unearth" the rich storehouse of ritual that is the Church's heritage by describing the importance of ritual in families and how the use of ritual can support families in times of change.

Importance of Ritual

Ritual is indeed an important consideration in providing care to families since many experts have pointed to a direct correlation between the type of ritualization in the family and the health of the family system. Those families which have very few rituals are usually also disorderly, lack coherence, and are without a clear sense of identity (Laird 1990, 125). On the other hand, those families that have many complex and rigid rituals experience difficulty adapting to change.

Some secular therapists recognize the importance of ritual and are increasing its use in family therapy to effect change. This heightened interest is reflected in several books by Evan Imber-Black and co-authors (Imber-Black and Roberts 1992, and Imber-Black, Roberts, and Whiting 1988). Barbara Myerhoff bemoans the sparcity of culturally generated rituals and encourages people to create their own to fill the need. Myerhoff makes a strong case for developing more rituals to address the complex transitions and relationships of the 80's and 90's (Myerhoff 1982, 131). Turner asserts:

> [There] is clearly a profound therapeutic value in the recognition and ritualization of recurrent problems involved in the maintenance and repair of human relationships and in assigning meaning to what subjectively may seem to be merely pain and loss (Turner 1982, 25-26).

These secular therapists have a better handle on the meaning and uses of ritual than is common among pastoral caregivers. Some published materials from secular professionals define the nuances of ritual more clearly and describe in detail ritual's therapeutic uses with families. I hope that pastoral caregivers will reawaken to the power of ritual and reclaim a rich heritage. Ritual, rooted firmly in God, is an important part of what defines our care as pastoral.

Annual, event-related, seasonal, and daily rituals play a significant role in many aspects of family identity and behavior. Bossard and Boll state:

> Family rituals are not only vessels to pass attitudes, behavior patterns, and social tools from one generation to the next. They are also processes of family interaction and as such: (a) stimulate family relations; (b) create family antagonisms; (c) reveal family roles and statuses; (d) set family techniques; (e) facilitate household functioning; (f) present opportunities for satisfaction in family display and pride (Bossard and Boll 1950, 58).

To this already impressive list of the functions of ritual, Imber-Black adds five themes of ritual: "membership, healing, identity definition and redefinition, belief expression and negotiation, and celebration" (Imber-Black 1988, xii). Rituals also acknowledge and legitimize change and transition, define meaning (Imber-Black and Roberts 1992, 27-28), delineate relational boundaries, and communicate and reinforce rules of behavior (Wolin and Bennett 1984, 401). Wolin and Bennett (1984, 401,403,407) add that rituals are the major component in determining, shaping, revising and maintaining a family's identity. Imber-Black reminds her readers that human systems all require a way of determining who belongs--how one becomes accepted or left out. She states: "Membership rituals occur daily in families during family meals, during which seating arrangements, allowable topics" all work together to make clear who belongs to the group and the status of their

membership (Imber-Black 1988, 51). Family rituals can also serve as a "security blanket," assuring family members that there is a part of the world that is predictable and lasting (Mitchell 1989, 70). Joan Laird vividly describes both the importance and pervasiveness of rituals in the life of the family:

> We cannot live without ritual, because "ritual orders our lives." It is the way we organize ourselves and our interactions with others in time and space, the way we mark the seasons, the weeks, the days. It enforces our rules for living, proclaiming when and how we eat, what we can talk about to whom, when and how we shall celebrate our travels through life (Laird 1990, 113).

John Westerhoff and William Willimon suggest that it is ritual that draws a group together into community, establishes order and meaning, and passes perceptions and values to future generations (Westerhoff and Willimon 1980, 40).

Imber-Black (1992) and Osterhaus (1989) agree that rituals form the perspective from which we interpret life, evaluate choices, and form relationships. Imber-Black refers to a "lens" through which we view life while Osterhaus uses the term "map." Imber-Black's description of this "lens" is a powerful affirmation of the significance of ritual as it impacts our everyday activities and relationships:

> [Rituals] are a lens through which we can see our emotional connections to our parents, siblings, spouse, children, and dear friends.

> Rituals give us places to be playful, to explore the meaning of our lives, and to rework and rebuild family relationships. They connect us to our past, define our present life, and show us a path to our future as we pass on ceremonies, traditions, objects, symbols, and ways of being with each other, handed down from previous generations (Imber-Black and Roberts 1992, 4).

There are many examples of how family rituals form one's expectations of what is "normal" and one's membership status in the family group. When I was a child, it was assumed that on Sundays my mother would put a beef roast in the oven before we went to church. I can still vividly remember all of us coming home from church to the wonderful smell of roast beef. If my mother did not prepare the roast, then we could be assured that we were eating Sunday lunch at the White Pine Restaurant in town. My assumptions as a child were that it was the norm to attend Sunday School and church with one's family, and to come home to a heavy lunch of roast beef and mashed potatoes. There was a sense of security and expectation in being able to predict that weekly ritual. Part of our identity as a family was that we attended Sunday School and church, and gathered for a family meal at lunchtime on Sundays. Rituals within the family form a communal frame of reference for such areas as discipline, religious beliefs, values and intimate bodily functions such as bathing, dressing, and bathroom use (Bossard and Boll 1950, 44).

Rituals of membership are most obvious when one is the outsider with a previous history of membership. After having lived some distance from my family of origin, and having been absent from the big family gathering at Christmas for eight or ten years, my nuclear family and I were reminded that we were now defined as "outsiders." A new ritual had been developed in those years in which we had not been present for the celebration. We received a letter about a week before Christmas asking us each to be ready to show off some talent prior to the gift opening portion of the Christmas Eve ritual. On Christmas Eve we sat uncomfortably listening to a saxophone solo and a violin duet, followed by a skit performed by a group of nieces and nephews. This was not our way of celebrating Christmas. We had become accustomed to opening our gifts on Christmas Day in a very informal, relaxed environment with just the four of us present.

Many elaborate family rituals are developed around holidays or special family commemorations. These traditions tend to become more complex and formalized with repetition over time. As part of our Christmas season celebration, we started baking and decorating sugar cookies when our children were small. We now spend weeks of intensive labor baking and decorating many dozens of some eight or ten different kinds of cookies. The choice of

decorating materials and creative designs multiply every year.

In addition to the illustrations already given, family rituals are developed around care for the family pet, holiday observances, vacation planning, illnesses, bathroom use, dinner, recreation, hellos and good-byes, bedtime, and a host of other repeated occurrences within the family (Bossard and Boll 1950, 34). Imber-Black and Roberts note: "Daily rituals give us a sense of the rhythm of our lives, help us in making the transition from one part of the day to another, and express who we are as a family" (Imber-Black and Roberts 1992, 15). Rituals encourage cooperation, dependability, individuality, competition, the expressing or hiding of emotions, a democratic or hierarchical structure, exclusiveness or inclusiveness, and many other traits which compose the family's unique identity and approach to the outside community (Bossard and Boll 1950, 82-84).

Through rituals, family members relive original events and return to former relational patterns. The family can either get "stuck" in patterns of interaction that are no longer helpful, or it can celebrate a past event or milestone in a way that allows members to gain stability and emotional energy from a common history. Michael Strassfeld's comment concerning the Jewish Seder refers to this kind of ritual remembrance: "On Pesah, by means of the seder and its rituals, we strive to reexperience and not

Just remember the slavery and redemption" (Strassfeld 1985, 81). One of the functions of all rituals is to provide either a way of reexperiencing the past or to experience the future, or both--while living in the present. Families with overly rigid and formal rituals often find themselves living in the past instead of the present, with very little vision of the future.

The family is an extremely formative arena for ritual. The family is the first social and emotional context in which a person finds himself or herself. When the stability of this vital link to humanity is disrupted, there is a strong sense of insecurity and identity loss. Ritual serves to maintain stability in the family (Bossard and Boll 1950, 63). It is within the context of family that a person learns maturity, what it means to be an individual and also a member of a community, social roles, and basic patterns of relating to other human beings (Stewart 1979, 21-22). Rituals that one learns at an early age in the family setting have a deep, lasting effect. Most psychologists still agree that ages one to five are crucial years in the development of personality and social skills. During these years the person spends most of her or his time under the care of the family on whom he or she depends.

Xavier Seubert describes the power of family rituals:

> The topic of domestic rituals is an important one because the domus is where, by way of either acceptance or reaction, understandings

> are developed and perceptions are performed into almost irreversible capacities of character (Seubert 1993, 38).

A family member's exclusion from an important family ritual often has a lasting effect. Rob was not permitted to attend his sister's funeral (see page 2) because she had committed suicide, and Rob was only six years old. This missed ritual affected not only Rob's ability to cope, but also reflected and affected the broken pattern of family communication and interaction for years after Jan's death:

> The making of ritual is a creative act fundamental in human life. It is also a divine gesture. Genesis tells us the first purpose of such creative action is to give form to what is formless. . . . Through ritual and ceremonies we people in turn make order out of chaos. In endless space, we create a fixed point to orient ourselves: a sacred space (Nelson 1986, 25).

Ritual is a much more pervasive and powerful force in forming and guiding family identity and interaction than is commonly recognized.

Limitations of This Study

The primary method of this study is a review of both secular and pastoral literature. In addition, I have included information from selected interviews and from my own ministry experience. Random statistical testing is beyond the limitations of this work. This paper contains several brief descriptions of actual cases and hypothetical composites. A wide variety of illustrations can be examined

in Rituals For Our Times by Evan Imber-Black and Janine Roberts (1992) and to a lesser degree in Rituals in Families and Family Therapy by Evan Imber-Black, Janine Roberts, and Richard Whiting (1988). Although these primarily illustrate the use of secular rituals, they are easily translatable into pastoral care settings.

Due to the focus on the utilization of ritual, this thesis is able only to touch on, but not to explore in depth, the theological implications of ritual. Some of the initial assumptions of this thesis are that worship pervades all of life, that pastoral care is a sacramental endeavor, and that the family is the prime arena in which individuals learn and practice the interface between belief and relationships. This learning occurs mainly through the acting out and observing of rituals within the family.

To a large degree, the specific application of the material presented in this paper will be left up to the reader, since it is impossible to prescribe appropriate rituals to fit a variety of very specific family situations. In all of the functions and aspects of ritual discussed, there are direct implications for pastoral caregivers. The degree to which ritual can be utilized in pastoral care and particularly in pastoral couseling will depend upon the level of training and expertise of the individual pastoral caregiver. Finally, even though Chapter 5 addresses some of the cautions and limits associated with the use of ritual,

it is probable that some important considerations have been omitted.

Summary of Chapters

The remaining chapters are devoted to exploring in more detail the utilization of ritual in the delivery of pastoral care. Chapter 2 deals with ways in which the family uses ritual to respond to change and transition. Special attention will be given to the role of ritual in the facilitation of letting go of the past and accepting the future. Chapter 3 focuses on the use of ritual as a tool in the assessing and healing processes of pastoral counseling. Chapter 4 delineates some of the factors one must consider when conducting rituals, and the significance of those factors. Chapter 5 suggests some cautions and limits which need to be observed as pastors increase the conscious use of ritual in the care of families, particularly in addressing the problems of family violence, mental illness, addictions and resistance to change. Chapter 6 contains a discussion of church leadership and worship patterns as models for the family system. The Conclusion highlights the failure of the clergy to take advantage of the potential benefits of ritual, and includes a call for a resurgence of ritual as a tool for providing ongoing support to families.

CHAPTER II

CHANGE AND TRANSITION: OPPORTUNITY FOR RITUAL

Change has always been part of the life of the family, but is more prevalent in this age of complexity and rapid metamorphosis. Ritual can provide a pathway through change to the new reality. Carefully planned and executed rituals can help family members release the past and look to the future with hopeful anticipation instead of fear.

The Functions of Ritual in Times of Transition

In the face of major changes that occur in the life of any family, ritual serves several vital adaptive functions. These functions briefly discussed here are: the assurance of stability through community, legitimizing and naming the change, letting go of the past while focusing on the future, and redefining family identity and membership.

Stability Through Community

Ritual provides the stability needed to feel safe in the midst of transition and change (Wolin and Bennett 1984, 412). Ritual also offers space and permission for experimentation with the new (Imber-Black and Roberts 1992, 3). When a family feels all alone in the face of unsolicited change, time-honored rituals can serve as a reminder that other members of the human community have faced similar challenges (Imber-Black and Roberts 1992,

270). When church members or friends are present, even a newly created ritual engenders the sense of connectedness with the human community. Ritual enables the family system to transcend itself as it expands to include members of the larger community.

Legitimizing and Naming the Transition

Rituals legitimize and name the transition. In that recognition and naming comes a sense of control. For example, several rituals mark the ending and beginning of the stages of life and even times of the day. As rituals name the unknown of change, the previously unknown becomes familiar, and there is a glimpse of normalcy. Roberts points out that ritual does more than merely accompany transition:

> The same time that ritual is marking social order, it can transform and destroy social structure and establish new norms and new traditions. Ritual can therefore not just mark a transition, but also make a transition at the same time (Roberts 1988, 14).

Letting Go of the Past: Focusing on the Future

Rituals help families recognize the value of the past and yet accept a new reality which enables family members to cope with change and loss (Laird 1990, 114). Richard Whiting describes his experience with assisting families in the "letting go" process:

> The letting go actions facilitate a cleansing and healing process. Over the years we have

> asked people to burn, freeze, bury, flush, or send up in balloons a variety of symbolic items, such as photographs, rings, letters, written memories, psychiatric records, and clothes. Such ritual actions have assisted people in moving beyond traumatic events and meanings that have interfered with their living in the present (Whiting 1988, 93).

Imber-Black sees unresolved loss as a particularly imprisoning problem and asserts that ritual can provide that necessary connection between past, present and future which allows families to move beyond the past. Imber-Black also suggests that rituals of transition work well for "the loss of bodily parts and functions due to illness and the often attendant loss of roles, life expectations, and dreams . . ." (Imber-Black 1988, 58-59). Imber-Black and Roberts describe the key role of ritual in negotiating the twists and turns of change:

> The profound and often precarious changes inherent in [life-cycle] transitions are made safe and manageable through rituals that connect us to our past, our cultural and religious roots, our potential future, and our common humanity (Imber-Black and Roberts 1992, 268).

Redefining Family Membership and Identity

Another primary function of life-cycle rituals is to redefine the family's identity and membership. When a son goes away to college or becomes a father, or a daughter graduates from high school or becomes engaged to be married, the whole family system undergoes change (Imber-Black 1988, 51, 63). "When we prepare and participate in life-cycle

rituals, our sense of self and our entire network of relationships in our family, extended family, and community undergo change" (Imber-Black and Roberts 1992, 269).

The Stages of Life-Cycle Passages

Arnold van Gennep, who coined the term "rites of passage," identified three stages of every life passage: (1) separation, (2) threshold, and (3) reaggregation (Turner 1982, 202). These stages could also be referred to either as (1) an ending, (2) a transitional period, and (3) a new beginning, or even as (1) death, (2) a wilderness period, and (3) resurrection. From the standpoint of ritual and of pastoral care, it is the second or "liminal" stage (transitional or wilderness period) which is most important. This wilderness stage is the time in which the actual ceremony is conducted. Through symbols and ritualized action, the person or family is invited to "experiment" with the new future in a symbolic way while situated in a "safe" space. In the ceremony, the rules, expectations, dangers and blessings of the new stage in life are recognized and blessed (Turner and Turner 1982, 202). When the pastoral caregiver helps families create a ritual to aid in a life-cycle transition or to support a different pattern of familial interaction, she or he needs to be aware of the purpose and power of the ceremony.

There is a symbolic parallel to this three-stage transition in the Jewish pilgrimage festivals. There is Passover which commemorates the escape from Egyptian bondage, followed by Shavuot which observes the giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai, and finally Sukkot which celebrates the journey to the promised land as well as ingathering and harvest (Strassfeld 1985, 125). It is noteworthy that the sealing of the covenant between God and God's people Israel occurred in the desert rather than the promised land. Speaking in terms of Christian eschatology, we are presently living in the transitional stage--the already but not yet. It is during this wilderness period that families most need to be connected with God's redeeming acts in the past and with God's promises for the future.

As was pointed out near the beginning of Chapter I, the official publications of various churches are full of rituals to mark almost any transition in the life of the family, but those excellent resources are seldom used. Barbara Myerhoff expresses dismay at the sparcity of "ceremonies that undo relationships or divest people of statuses," especially considering the growing need for such support in this day of "rapid individual mobility and social change" (Myerhoff 1982, 131). Imber-Black and Roberts echo the sentiment that there are too few rituals to recognize life-cycle changes: "There are many crucial life-cycle transitions for which there are no familiar and accepted

rituals in our culture" (Imber-Black and Roberts 1992, 283). They further state: "Since life-cycle rituals enable us to begin to rework our sense of self and our relationships as required by life's changes, the lack of such rituals can make change more difficult" (Imber-Black and Roberts 1992, 283). As mentioned before, pastoral caregivers can go a long way in filling this gap by merely utilizing the resources already available.

Primary Life-Cycle Events

There are certain stages of life through which every human is likely to pass. The most prominent of these are birth, adolescence, marriage (or a close friendship), and death. In addition, there are other life passages such as: the first step, the advent of language capabilities, the first day of school, graduations, leaving home, career choices and changes, parenthood, retirement, and a host of others which stand as mileposts along the journey of life. The scope of this project will allow only a cursory look at the function of ritual in the primary life-cycle events of birth and adoption, transition into adulthood, marriage, and death.

Childbirth and Adoption

One of the common changes experienced by the family system in relation to the stages of life is the birth or adoption of a child. It is important for those providing

pastoral care to families to realize that children are not only one of the greatest blessings but also potentially one of the greatest burdens and responsibilities families experience. The addition of a baby or small child can cause great and rather sudden changes in the structure of the family. The Church needs to recognize the adoption or birth of a child as a life and family-transforming event, and to offer the support of the community of faith. This support can be invited and symbolized through rituals conducted in congregational worship, at the hospital and in the home (Westerhoff and Willimon 1980, 132). Two comments made by Susan Sered about the connections between childbirth and religious beliefs for Jewish women are interesting in regard to ritual and childbirth:

> Ethnographic descriptions of premodern societies have shown childbirth to be a socio-spiritual phenomenon, a woman's rite of passage, and a potentially fulfilling and self-enriching life experience (Sered 1991, 8).

> The women I interviewed had heavy emotional investments in their relationships and potential relationships with their babies, they were actively interested in rituals to protect their babies, and they consistently described the developing relationship with their babies as miraculous (Sered 1991, 12).

Birth is an opportunity for the use of ritual. Prayers and blessings before, during, and immediately following birth can provide welcomed support to new parents and to any siblings. Since the women in Sered's study stated that the

rituals observed at home before coming to the hospital were more meaningful than those attempted at the hospital (Sered 1991, 11), perhaps a short service of prayer, blessing, and Scripture could be prepared in brochure form to be used by the parents just prior to departing for the hospital. There are also excellent services of blessing for an adopted child in Jewish, Catholic, and Lutheran resources. There is an outline of such a service in Liturgy and Learning Through the Life Cycle (Westerhoff and Willimon 1980, 133).

With the pastor's guidance, Margaret and Fred (see page 1) could create a ritual of welcome which would involve members from both families of origin. Members of the families of origin could even be asked to participate in the planning of such a ritual. The ceremony could be conducted in the couple's home with representatives of the congregation present, or as a part of the congregational worship service depending on a variety of factors affecting the two families of origin. Creation of a ritual would at least make clear the feelings of Fred's family, assure them of support from the community of faith, and enable them to feel blessed before God.

Transition to Adulthood

Although there are many changes which occur during adolescence, there are few ceremonies in Western society which mark the transition from childhood to adulthood.

Life-changing events such as going out on the first date, getting a driver's license, shaving for the first time, and beginning to menstruate are seldom marked by significant rituals.

Particularly neglected, and even defined as taboo, is any kind of public recognition of the changes which occur in the reproductive capabilities of both males and females. In this regard, Joan Laird decries the lack of recognition of a girl's entrance into adolescence:

> It has been argued that few meaningful rituals exist in our society to mark or celebrate the young girl's movement through the life cycle, to help her shape her own identity as a female. . . . In our society the onset of menachre often has been a joyless occasion, unmarked by celebration and accompanied by shame, secrecy, confusion, and a sense of uncleanliness (Laird 1988, 347).

Perhaps the church could create rituals and celebrations which recognize the entrance into young adulthood. Confirmation services are an attempt to usher in a new status, but fall far short of recognizing all the confusing and celebrative emotions experienced by both individuals and families as members of the family system enter adolescence. Westerhoff and Willimon (1980, 79-80) highly recommend a rite of adulthood at around age sixteen which would grant young adults authority to be elected to decision-making groups in the church and would encourage

their participation as lectors, teachers, and prayer leaders.

Marriage

Marriage entails an evaluation of family rituals. Some are discarded because now there is an excuse to abandon long-tolerated traditions. Both bride and groom need to consider taking a more serious look at their own family rituals as part of the preparation for marriage.

The prayers and blessings surrounding the wedding ceremony need to recognize the change that is taking place in the families of the bride and groom. The pastor also needs to visit the newly married couple's residence. Westerhoff and Willimon point out that the service for the blessing of a home could be tailored to meet the joys and concerns of a new marriage:

> The celebration of a marriage requires the church to act out the incarnational nature of its faith, to see the divine in the midst of human relationships, to affirm that creation, sexuality, and procreation are part of God's good scheme of things . . . . (Westerhoff and Willimon 1980, 104)

As a marriage progresses, additional rituals are discarded, revised, and created. Many rituals of the families of origin reappear later in the marriage, especially with the addition of children. Sometimes rituals surrounding such activities as how to celebrate holidays, when and how meals are to be eaten, and what constitutes a

vacation can cause great difficulty (Bossard and Boll 1950, 88, 136-137, 141).

Death

Death is undoubtedly the most challenging and disturbing rite of passage for families. It often comes either swiftly and unexpectedly, or through a long, dibilitating, and painful illness. Sometimes death is the result of a tragic accident, violent crime, or suicide. Regardless of the manner in which it comes, death is an incredible strain on the family.

Imber-Black points out that, because of the need for healing, funeral rites are practiced in almost every culture:

> Rituals to effect healing can be found in every culture's funeral rites, which simultaneously mark the loss of a member, facilitate expression of grief, and point to a direction for ongoing life (Imber-Black 1988, 54).

Therapeutic rituals are particularly helpful when death is the result of violent or tragic circumstances. In many cases, even years later, family members will have a need for healing rituals if the circumstances surrounding the death prevented the family members from adequately expressing their grief at the time of the loss. Pastoral caregivers should create such rituals in a joint process with the family (Imber-Black 1988, 55).

Imber-Black describes the situation of a woman in her late twenties who came to therapy because she could not complete anything. Her mother had died when the woman was fourteen, and the family doctor had advised her not attend the funeral because of her strong sense of grief. The family moved shortly after the death so that she was not able to attend her Junior High graduation. She had a difficult time completing assignments in her new school. The father did not want her to visit the old house. Even at age twenty-eight, she felt she needed permission to visit the former home. On the advice of her therapist, she found old photos of her mother, visited the house and took photos, and finally was able to take her father with her to the house where they both cried. She could then continue with her life (Imber-Black 1988, 56-58).

In the case of Rob's unresolved grief (see page 2), the pastor and family could create a private family memorial service that uses newspaper clippings in combination with a discussion Jan's death. The service could include the showing of photos of Jan as an infant and a child. Prayers could be offered for God's presence in time of anguish. Placing some momento or symbol of Jan's life in a special place in the house might also be helpful. A more public memorial service is also a possibility. The church could include the family's name in the intercessory prayers. Since the father felt as if he were guilty of causing Jan's

death, even though he was not responsible for the suicide, the pastoral counselor will want to explore the foundations of the father's unfounded guilt. Once the father has begun to recognize his innocence, a private, or family, service might be offered to affirm and celebrate the lifting of the burden of unfounded sense of guilt. Rituals in Families and Family Therapy, contains many examples of rituals which address unresolved feelings of grief and loss (Imber-Black, Roberts, and Whiting 1988).

Imber-Black contends that relevant healing rituals are needed today more than ever because most people now die in a hospital or other institution rather than at home. The occurrence of death outside the home distances families from the loss, and makes it more difficult to readjust the family structure to fill the empty spot (Imber-Black 1988, 55).

One category of grief that needs more attention from pastors is the grief experienced by parents as result of a spontaneous abortion or a stillbirth. These parents need some kind of ritual that assures them that both the birth and their grief are recognized as real. As a Navy Chaplain in a small naval hospital in Naples, Italy, I learned very quickly how important it was to present the stillborn infant to the parents dressed in baby clothes for them to rock and hold. I experienced firsthand the power of prayer and of God's Word in their time of profound grief. The ritualized nature of the viewing of the dead child by their parents

provided them a "safe" place to express the confusing mix of joy and despair at the birth and death of their child. Prayers which recognized their grief and commended the infant to God's care were especially helpful. The presence of their pastor symbolized the presence of God as they walked through the valley (Ramshaw 1987, 75-77). A family who has experienced this kind of loss will need consistent pastoral care for years afterward.

Visiting gravesites at certain times of the year is a ritual that serves as a continuation of the grieving process (Imber-Black 1988, 54-55). The Church does not do enough to recognize this ongoing process. In addition to naming all those who have died in the past year during the prayer on All Saints Sunday or Memorial Day, the pastor could give family members the opportunity to include the names of those who have died over the past several years. Many families would also find it helpful to receive a visit from the pastor or lay representatives of the congregation on the anniversary of the death of a family member. Such visits could incorporate a ritual blessing, written for the particular situation. These anniversary visits could open up an opportunity for healing intervention in cases where there is unresolved or blocked grief.

Freidman, rabbi of Judea Reformed Congregation in Durham, North Carolina, describes the Jewish observance of the anniversary of a death:

> On the anniversary of the death of one of the seven closest relatives, there's something called "Yahrzeit," a year's observance. At that time, a person comes to the synagogue and says "Kaddish" which is a prayer for life because that's the time when they're most likely to say there's no hope, there's no God and there's no future, so we have them come to the synagogue on that anniversary and say a prayer for life, God, and future (Freidman 1993).

Prehn, the pastor of St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Durham, North Carolina, also relates a powerful account of the power of ritual in dealing with death:

> I just used [the Service for the Commendation of the Dying] maybe two months ago with a woman who eventually died about a week later. I met with the family in the nursing home because they said the doctor had told them it would be only a few days. They asked me if we could use the Commendation of the Dying. . . . there was the daughter and her husband and the dying woman and her granddaughter, and we used it straight through including annointing of oil--I use oil--and making the sign of the cross on the forehead of the woman who was dying. I think we all had the sense that that was the appropriate thing to do. It seemed to say, "now we're ready" as the Nunc Dimittis says "now let your servant go in peace." "We're ready to let go now." It was very powerful (Prehn, 1993).

Other Transitional Events

In addition to the commonly acknowledged and sometimes commemorated transitions in the life of the family, there are a host of other often more frequently occurring changes which are unmarked by any planned ceremony, some of which go virtually unnoticed. These include: geographical

relocation, broken relationships, and the routine transitions of daily living and relating.

Geographical Relocation

One of the most frequently occurring transitions faced by the present-day family is geographical relocation. Moving changes the physical and social environment of family rituals, thus rendering some of them impossible to continue (Bossard and Boll 1950, 24). A changed set of needs, crises and joys can put a heavy strain on the family system. Newly devised rituals can meet these family needs. John Westerhoff and William Willimon claim:

> [In] recent interviews with middle-aged married couples, moving was rated as the second most stressful experience the couples encountered, second only to the death of a close friend or relative. Moving also carries with it the possibility of new life. . . . (Westerhoff and Willimon 1980, 136)

A ritual of departure conducted in the home which the family is about to leave behind would be helpful. It could include the blessing of symbols of the present home, symbols which could then be taken to the new home. The pastoral caregiver also needs to be aware that there is often a reassessment of spirituality and of vocation by family members during the process of planning a move (Westerhoff and Willimon 1980, 139). The planning of farewell rituals to be held either in the home or as a part of public worship needs to take these factors into consideration.

In order better to care for families who have just relocated, the Church needs to pay more attention to how new families are recognized and received into the congregation. Rather than just an official transfer of membership and a brief introduction, a service of reception into membership could include blessings issuing from the community of faith, and prayers for guidance in their time of transition. The congregation could commission a sponsor to help the new family adjust to the community. As part of the ritual, the church should host a reception to encourage the integration of the new family around the table. A well-planned ritual serves to usher the newly arrived family into a new community of faith, and blesses this new place so it now becomes both familiar and sacred (Westerhoff and Willimon 1980, 141).

The "Blessing of a Dwelling" is a ritual which can be extremely supportive to a family who has just completed a move. Both Occasional Services published by Augsburg Publishing House (1982), and the Book of Blessings published by The Liturgical Press (1989) include examples of such a service. Many other worship resources contain similar services of blessing. The Blessing of a Dwelling is an important resource at other times in addition to family relocation: a new addition to the household, the moving out of a family member, during or at the conclusion of counseling, and annually as recommended in the Roman

Catholic and Greek Orthodox traditions. Westerhoff and Willimon explain:

> In blessing a home, we are publicly claiming this place as a place of God, a holy endeavor with important spiritual consequences for those who live there. We are invoking the presence of God into the midst of our mundane and everyday life together (Westerhoff and Willimon 1980, 139).

Westerhoff and Willimon also suggest an excellent pattern for such a ritual:

> The liturgy may begin in the living room of the home, or on the steps before the front door. Then the worshippers move into each room of the house, praying for God's blessing upon the various family functions which will occur in that room. As the congregation moves from one room to the next, candles may be lit in each room to signify the presence of God in this place. Be sure to include the family children in each part of the liturgy. A Eucharist could then be celebrated in the dining room or living room of the home, having family members assist the celebrant in the prayers and in the distribution of the elements (Westerhoff and Willimon 1980, 141).

As with any ritual, the formality and details of the ceremony vary greatly with each family. Prehn has experienced that variation in the blessing of homes. "I've had it as involved as forty or fifty people there with a printed service or as laid back as taking the Occasional Services book with the family and going from room to room" (Prehn 1993).

Westerhoff and Willimon (1980, 141) further envision the blessing of a resident's room in a nursing home or retirement village as the elderly or disabled person moves

to her or his new home--what a fantastic way to support the family who must give up the care of an elderly parent. The Church can bless this new state of affairs by offering the assurance that God also dwells in this place. Dad or Grandma are still part of the human family and the family of God. The transition of a member to a nursing home is a traumatic one for most family systems and needs to be blessed.

Broken Relationships

Broken relationships, including divorce, are another transition faced in many families. When an important relationship comes to an end, there are many pastoral care needs such as: closure of the relationship, a realization of brokeness, forgiveness and absolution, healing, community recognition and support, and the sorting out of new statuses for parents and children (Ramshaw 1987, 53). Ramshaw suggests a house blessing for the new household of the spouse who is granted primary custody to help children and parent feel connected in a time when they may otherwise feel deserted (Ramshaw 1987, 54).

Despite the fact that the past needs to be released and the future embraced following a divorce, most Christian denominations have no divorce ritual. If one examines the Jewish "Ritual of Release" (Central Conference of American Rabbis 1988), it is clear that a properly worded ritual does

not trivialize the commitment of marriage. The ritual simply recognizes that a transition has taken place. If anything, a ritual of release recognizes that a significant relationship has now ended. This author would suggest including some sort of symbol such as photos, letters, or documents (or copies if the originals are needed for legal purposes) which could be ritually burned or buried. Children should be present, and somehow included as participants.

Imber-Black and Roberts describe one case in which the divorced woman was instructed to spend one hour a day for two weeks writing down on index cards feelings and events from the former marriage. After she had carried these around for a few weeks, she was ready to plan a ritual in which the cards were ceremoniously burned (Imber-Black and Roberts 1992, 134). This type of ritual supports the holding on and letting go process that occurs when a relationship comes to an end. Liturgy and Learning Through the Life Cycle contains helpful advice in planning divorce rituals:

> Pastoral discretion must be exercised in deciding what form our liturgical response to divorce might take. We walk a theological and pastoral tightrope in our dealings with divorced and divorcing persons. On the one hand, we want to be honest and truthful about the church's values in regard to marriage and its covenant. On the other, we want to be compassionate and evangelistic about the church's care and grace for those who, for whatever reasons, are unable to keep the

marriage covenant (Westerhoff and Willimon 1980, 131).

Daily Transitions

Pastors often fail to recognize that the daily transitions which are a part of the life of every family are opportunities for ritual. Pastors and family members alike are often unaware that these transitions are even occurring. The most common daily transitional events are: breakfast, leaving for and returning from school or work, and bedtime. The rituals which occur during these times form bridges between the various parts of the day and between the differing roles which comprise our lives. The ritual that bridges the gap between employee and mother for instance may be a simple kiss and change of clothes, or may include a twenty minute walk with members of the family and a long hot shower, or a quiet time for contemplation and prayer. These daily rituals are often as powerful and revealing as the rituals that occur at the crucial intersections in life.

Pastoral Care Considerations

As these examples demonstrate, religious rituals can be instrumental in guiding the family through the major changes in life and the more frequent transitions of moves, broken relationships, and daily activities. Imber-Black and Roberts indeed point out that life-cycle rituals usually involve religious ceremonies and are celebrated in a sacred

place such as a church, synagogue, mosque, or temple with a clergyperson present (Imber-Black and Roberts 1992, 269).

This gravitation toward religion in the face of change places pastoral caregivers in a very honored and responsible position. The way in which they plan and conduct the ritual could have a profound impact on the family even if the family is not normally very "religious" in the sense of being an active part of a congregation. These occasions carry powerful symbolic messages for the family and so must be handled with great care, taking into consideration the peculiar circumstances of each family.

Expanding the Leadership Base

Each one of the more frequent transitions, as well as the more recognized but less frequent life-cycle events, presents an opportunity for pastoral care in the form of ritual. Obviously, the clergy cannot possibly celebrate a ritual with every family to commemorate each one of these markers, so he or she needs to consider the options which are available for providing some kind of ritualized recognition of these important events.

To recoginze certain passages, the worshipping community can celebrate annual rituals. When exercising this option, the minister must be sensitive to the differing (and many times hidden) joys and problems of families. The minister must recognize that many forms of family violence

are hidden, and that some family members might be silent victims of rape or other violent crimes. The wording, invitations to participate, and symbols connected with such a community celebration must be planned carefully with these considerations in mind. For instance, to emphasize the permanence of the marriage bond as a part of the remembrance of wedding anniversaries might further isolate the partner who is the victim of abuse.

Ministers can train laypersons to conduct some of the blessings and observances. The congregation can recognize specific life-cycle events during certain months of the year. Ordained clergy can choose which rites of passage require their personal involvement.

The pastoral caregiver might consider constructing a sort of "do-it-yourself" service of prayer, blessing and Scripture, tailored for a variety of specific occasions, which families can conduct themselves. Whichever method is employed, the presence of representatives from the worshipping community is important to emphasize the important ritual element of community support.

Preparation for a Ritual of Transition

The preparation for a ritual of transition can play an important role in confronting family members with the reality of the change and necessitating their dealing with the issues. Imber-Black and Roberts mention the example of

the upcoming marriage of a Presbyterian and a Jew. The decision to have a big church wedding forced family members on both sides to deal with the reality of their differing religious faiths. They had to find a rabbi and minister who would perform a joint ceremony; the families had to communicate with each other to plan the wedding; and the differing wedding traditions had to be somehow incorporated in the ceremony. The planning of the ritual broke the silent controversy between the families (Imber-Black and Roberts 1992, 272-273).

The importance of preparation holds true for the commemoration of a major event such as a death or birth in the family, and for such daily occurrences as the transition from employee to mother or father. The relocation of furniture for the Thanksgiving meal or the purchasing of a flower on the way home from work are not insignificant preludes to the "main event."

According to Imber-Black and Roberts, "Using familiar symbols, known symbolic actions, and repeated words, rituals make change manageable and safe" (Imber-Black and Roberts 1992, 32). According to Victor Turner, Barbara Myerhoff issues a defiant call for ritual:

> [We] should . . . take our crises and transitions into our own hands, ritualize them, make them meaningful, and pass through and beyond them in a spirit of celebration, to begin a new uncluttered phase of our lives. . . . (Turner 1982, 26)

Barriers to Successful Transitions

The imposition of tragedy, loss, violence, or cause for guilt or shame occur near the time of a life-cycle ritual can severely interrupt the normal process of transition. The pastoral caregiver needs to watch out for these roadblocks and somehow incorporate the recognition of them in the ritual. To conduct the ritual as if the difficulties do not exist is to become a partner in the family's denial.

Some members of a family may be very much frozen in time, and may be stuck in the stage of life at which a particular tragedy or loss occurred. This frozeness in time can occur as a result of a major argument in the family, a serious automobile accident, suicide, or the exclusion of particular family members from certain rituals (especially funerals and remarriages). Imber-Black and Roberts observe: "Since life-cycle rituals work to change our sense of ourselves and to transform our central relationships, there can be lasting and profound effects when these rituals go awry" (Imber-Black and Roberts 1992, 278).

Pastors should be alert to whether families observe certain holidays and family events in a very rigid way. This pattern is an indication that some tragedy may have happened around the time of the celebration (Imber-Black and Roberts 1992, 255). Even though the marriage or funeral may have taken place years in the past, the pastor should consider reworking the ritual to recognize the loss.

Imber-Black and Roberts point out that one of the marvelous properties of ritual is its capacity to handle grief and celebration simultaneously. Most families do not understand this capacity of ritual and so will try to separate these conflicting feelings. Instead of denying a portion of their feelings, families should be encouraged to acknowledge a particular holiday or anniversary as different because of some loss or tragedy, and then plan ways in which to incorporate symbols and memories of the loss. The ritual then becomes an instrument of healing (Imber-Black and Roberts 1992, 258-259).

Roberts recommends that family rituals need to be solid enough to provide security yet flexible enough to meet changing conditions and needs:

> The capacity to change rituals over the life cycle keeps the rituals vibrant for families, gives families access to special times to mark and rework roles, rules, and relationships, and provides group cohesion. Families are constantly undergoing change, as everyone grows older, new members enter and members leave. Flexibility to adapt rituals means
>
> that these changes can be worked within meaningful ways (Roberts 1988, 33).

With each new addition or loss to the family, there is a correspondent change in the nature of family rituals since the cast of characters has changed. One member who cannot or will not act out her or his role in the prescribed manner, affects the interactions of the entire family. A rigid system of rituals can keep the members of a family

locked into an increasingly dysfunctional and even abusive system. A flexible system is able to adjust to change in a constructive and freeing manner.

Conclusion

Well-planned rituals allow for the safe discharge of such strong feelings as anger, loneliness, fear, and sorrow which often occur during times of transition (Wolin and Bennett 1984, 411). When conflicting emotions cause confusion, the naming and blessing of the change assures the members of the family that this emotional confusion is normal. Particularly meaningful are blessings which legitimize the new reality in the presence of the community of faith. As the community of God's people affirms the change, blessings become reality. The religious rituals of baptism, confirmation, marriage, and burial are good examples of this creative power of God at work.

In many Biblical narratives, a new reality is named. Jacob wrestled with God and became Israel; Saul the Pharisee became Paul the missionary; Cephas became Peter; and Abram became Abraham. With change came a new reality and a new name.

Pastoral caregivers can be instrumental in helping families through periods of transition by creating, advertising and using rituals for many of the common transitions experienced by families. The vignettes at the

beginning of this thesis can be used to illustrate the usefulness of ritual for helping families to face transition and change. For instance, Cynthia's and Ken's pastor might encourage them to plan a house blessing, with invitations being extended to members of their new congregation and neighborhood. Representatives from the congregation could take part in the ceremony, and provide refreshments. In the case of George and Mary, the pastor could be the bless their new child and family, with Jeff offering the symbolic gift of a baby toy he has outgrown or an original piece of artwork for his new sister's room. The church community could gather around Kathy to provide a house warming to accompany the blessing of her new home. The pastor might also assist Kathy in creating a ritual of release when she is ready to begin letting go of the ties to her former husband.

Through the sharing of common changes and rituals, families are connected to other families and to the whole people of God. Westerhoff and Willimon point out:

> Our rites of life crisis help to make change meaningful in our lives, to restore order and harmony in the community affected by these changes, and to aid everyone, but particularly the next generation, to understand the meaning and purpose of change in human life (Westerhoff and Willimon 1980, 101).

Clergypersons often underestimate the incredible symbolic power of both life-cycle and situation related rituals.

CHAPTER III

PASTORAL COUNSELING: ASSESSMENT AND HEALING

When families sense they are on the verge of a crisis, pastors are often the first resource to which family members turn for help. Pastors are in a position to provide frequent, ongoing contact and support of the family during recovery from loss or upheaval within the family system. The planning and conducting of rituals are important contributions which the pastor can offer to assist hurting families. The discussion in Chapter 2 about the use of ritual in coping with the stages of life and with the transitions experienced in daily living, presented the relevancy of ritual for pastoral counseling.

This chapter describes the use of ritual in both the assessing and healing aspects of pastoral counseling. A pastor cannot escape the responsibility of counseling families. As J. C. Wynn aptly puts it:

> There has never been any question about whether pastors ought to be doing family counseling; in this matter, they have no choice. The problem is how well they do it and to what extent they are prepared. That they will become involved with marriage conflicts and dysfunctional families is inevitable (Wynn 1991, 17).

The first part of the chapter describes how the pastoral counselor can employ ritual in the assessment of the real problems in the family system. The remainder of the chapter explores creative and powerful ways of applying ritual in

the healing process that is a vital part of the pastoral counseling task.

The Use of Ritual in Assessment

The pastoral caregiver can examine a family's daily rituals to assess methods of coping and interacting, as well as roles, communication patterns, goals, boundaries, and level of adaptability. Wolin and Bennett comment:

> As clinical researchers, we have . . . found family rituals to serve as a window into a family's underlying shared identity, providing special access to the behavioral and emotional tenor characterizing each family (Wolin and Bennett 1984, 401).

Wynn adds:

> The rules, and rituals, and roles of that family will throw bright light on the behavior and reactions of each of the individuals within it (Wynn 1991, 45).

Joan Laird agrees:

> [Asking] a family about its rituals or having the privilege to share in the enactment of one provides rapid and vivid access to family beliefs and organizations (Laird 1990, 113).

Careful assessment is a prerequisite to responsible pastoral counseling. According to the authors quoted above, observation of the family's rituals serves as a "window" into those needs. As family members describe rituals, they reveal secrets and modes of interaction which otherwise they may deny or hide. This strong connection between rituals and the underlying family system suggests that changes in a

family's ritual life might actually impact the shape of the family system.

Characteristics of Healthy and Unhealthy Family Systems

Any attempt at assessment presuposes a set of values and assertions about what constitutes health. In this study, I describe the healthy family system as one that can constructively adapt to change, and that is able to grow into new realities while maintaining its basic identity and values. The healthy family also maintains appropriate boundaries, but these boundaries are negotiable and relatively permeable. The unhealthy family system has difficulty adapting to change, and will often either cling to the past or panic when faced with change. Boundaries in the unhealthy system tend to be either very rigid or almost nonexistent, and are likely to be greatly affected by crises. Likewise, values tend either to be narrowly defined and stringently enforced, or almost nonexistent. The following discussion examines more in-depth the specific contrasting characteristics of healthy and unhealthy family systems.

A healthy family system is democratic in structure and has a set of traditions and rituals which are well established yet readily adaptable in the face of change and loss (Stewart 1979, 40). Roberto describes this ability to adapt:

> [In] the healthy family, [transgenerational mandates] can be examined, negotiated, and adapted to as individuals advance in their own life cycles. . . . The healthy family finds creative ways to reconcile present needs with the past traditions and values that cycle slowly through current living (Roberto 1991, 447-448).

Although this thesis emphasizes the flexibility of traditions, boundaries and rituals, stability (as opposed to rigidity) is essential for the health of a family system. Flexibility, as used in this study, is not synonymous with the abandonment of traditions or boundaries in the face of change. Flexibility includes the ability to envision alternatives which are compatible with current traditions and boundaries, and a recognition of the possible worth of new ideas and various patterns of relating.

One structural characteristic of the healthy family is that its permeable boundaries allow for close relationships both within the family and with those outside the family. The prime connection for family members is with the nuclear family, but they also maintain a healthy tie with the families of origin. The family system is also flexible and creative in its solutions to problems, and in the assignment of roles (Roberto 1991, 446-447). James Osterhaus' list describing a health family agrees with Roberto's definition:

> Boundaries are clear and firm.
> The family has a large repertoire of behaviors for solving problems and negotiating life-cycle passages.
> Family rules (maps) are flexible and open to change (Osterhaus 1989, 113).

Dysfunctional families are likely to have extremely rigid internal boundaries which preclude creativity in relationships in the face of changing situations and demands. At the other extreme, however, the dysfunctional family may lack internal boundaries, which then makes it very difficult for individual family members to understand their peculiar roles in the system. The dysfunctional family may also have no effective external boundaries and be dependent on outside resources for the solving of its problems (Roberto 1991, 449-450). If traditional patterns for addressing a particular problem do not work, the dysfunctional family will be at a loss, and will likely try to deny the problem or blame a "scapegoat" for the difficulty rather than examine ways to adapt creatively to the new set of circumstances (Wynn 1991, 22). Conflict and change are viewed as threats (Roberto 1991, 450-451). Wynn asserts that the absence of flexibility is a common factor in dysfunctional families:

> For any family to move into new levels of development requires some flexibility; but flexibility is what troubled families lack. In point of fact, the more dysfunctional the family is, the more rigid it is likely to be, since it has established some homeostasis at a level of rigidity (Wynn 1991, 89-90).

Laird notes that family rituals can serve as methods by which the family perpetuates this rigidity:

> Some families develop elaborate and rigid rituals which ward off change and mask contradictions. . . . Other rituals keep particular

> family members in subordinate positions, scapegoat a particular family member, or simply serve to hold family members close, preventing their leaving (Laird 1990, 126).

The relative inability to adapt and modify rituals over time as situations and participants shift signals trouble in the family system. Either the dysfunctional family will flee to rigid rituals in time of change and insist that every detail remain the same, or it will flounder with no rituals at all to guide the family through change. Some unhealthy families are essentially unritualized with very little recognition of holidays, transitions, and anniversaries. Healthy families will retain a repertoire of rituals, but will be able to modify them as the need arises (Imber-Black and Roberts 1992, 58).

The ability to adjust rituals, yet retain them, is a sign of health in the family unit. Rituals are needed to form and ensure a cohesive unit. The inability to change is a symptom of a poor level of trust, the presence of fear, and feelings of inadequacy. Periods of tension will arise as the make-up of the family changes and members reach transitional stages in life. Flexible rituals are needed to meet this challenge successfully.

Avenues of Assessment

Once pastoral counselors recognize ritual as a necessary component in maintaining the family system, they can use various types of family ritual as avenues of

assessing the family system and the nature of the family's problems. This section briefly introduces several avenues of assessment available to the pastor who chooses to look through the "window" of family rituals to determine the type of support needed by a particular family. The avenues mentioned here are holiday observances, vacations, meals, and daily routines.

Holiday Celebrations

One place to start this assessment process, according to Imber-Black and Roberts, is with the manner in which family members celebrate holidays and special occasions:

> Since rituals are a lens through which you can see developmental and relationship issues, discovering the absence of celebration in rituals where you expect it to be is a signal that work needs to be done. A genuine sense of celebration is often missing from rituals when there has been relationship cutoff, when important issues have gone underground and cannot be discussed, or when losses remain unhealed, unspoken, or unresolved (Imber-Black and Roberts 1992, 53).

The pastoral counselor can ask family members to describe: the last holiday or event the family celebrated, the number of times a year the family gathers to celebrate, how the family prepares for and observes holidays, who fulfills which roles, and how observances are brought to a close (Roberts 1988, 26-27). The information gathered will reveal much about the dynamics of family interaction.

Vacations

The minister can also ask the family to describe their most recent vacation, including planning and packing. Asking about family vacations is a good way of assessing the pace, goals, personalities, roles, interaction, and level of flexibility within the family. Families ritualize vacations. Many families travel to the same or similar locations every year. The roles of various members during the planning stages are almost identical each year, and give a glimpse of role distribution within the family system.

Daily Routines

Daily routines of the family are often highly ritualized and provide excellent clues into the operation and health of the family system. During counseling and home visits, the pastoral caregiver could ask about or observe bedtime, mealtime, greeting, good-bye, leisure, and disciplining rituals (Wolin and Bennett 1984, 406). Imber-Black and Roberts assert that asking about a family's dinner ritual can give important insight into family membership:

> The family meal is a ritual through which you can learn about many aspects of family relationships, including gender roles; boundaries around individuals, pairs, threesomes, and the whole family; allowable topics for conversation; the range of permitted emotions; and changes in family members (Imber-Black and Roberts 1992, 156).

The pastoral counselor could inquire about the symbolic meaning of food in the family, about roles such as setting the table and cleaning up, how the time for dinner is set,

and seating arrangements (Imber-Black and Roberts 1992, 164). Taking a look at the family's rituals of leaving and returning might also be helpful. Are hellos and good-byes forced or relaxed? Is one member greeted any differently than another? Are there any rituals surrounding leaving and returning (Imber-Black and Roberts 1992, 146)?

Examining various daily rituals can provide good insight into the locus of power within the family (Bossard and Boll 1950, 86). Daily rituals define boundaries, roles, worth, membership, values, priorities, rules, taboos, and methods of conflict resolution (Imber-Black and Roberts 1992, 144-145). The pastoral counselor needs to be sensitive to these seemingly insignificant daily rituals during home visits, or as families participate in church activities. Family members often have difficulty describing their structural characteristics, communication patterns, or the roles each plays in the system. By asking family members to describe a particular daily ritual, the counselor will gain some insight into the actual patterns of family interaction. He or she can then help the family interpret those patterns. By outlining the ritual involved in daily activities, family members themselves may come to see for the first time their own hidden relational patterns and assumptions. Pastoral counselors must encourage family members to look carefully and honestly at the process and roles portrayed in the ritual. Once family members become

aware of and begin to analyze the individual components of a particular recurring ritual, the change process has already begun.

Access to the Home: Advantage for Pastors

Wynn reminds pastors that they have the advantage of often knowing the situations, backgrounds, and home environment of those who come for counseling because of free access to the home (Wynn 1991, vii, 125). In order to take advantage of this "trump card," ministers need to be observant of the daily rituals of parishoners as they meet family members on the street, visit them in their homes, or work with family members on committees. When the family makes an appointment for counseling, the minister is wise to prepare for the appointment by making a visit to the home, or by jotting down examples of known family rituals he or she has observed during home visits. These practices provide a glimpse into the dynamics of the family unit--its goals, attitudes, priorities and key players. Prehn agrees that observing the family's rituals in the "natural" setting of the home is very helpful in counseling and in delivering pastoral care:

> Watching the interaction between members as well as just seeing the environment--pictures on the wall, the magazines on the table. . . . what's sitting around . . . . I've visited people where they've kept the television on the whole time while we've talked. Well that says a lot about the family structure . . . . How children come in and out of the room. They often aren't

> part of the conversation even though I try to include them. When they come to church, it's more the laboratory setting. . . . In the home I might hear a parent yell at a child, "Go to your room and do your homework," or "What did you say that for?" (Prehn 1993)

Aspects of Healing

Ritual not only serves as a lens through which to view family dynamics, but also can bring about positive change and provide support for healing. The power of ritual resides in its ability to stabilize, transform, and communicate (Wolin and Bennett 1984, 401). Rituals are powerful symbolic ways to stabilize what is healthy in a family, to transform what is dysfunctional, and to build up resistance to unhealthy interactions. The use of religious rituals introduces God's grace, commands, and guidance in a parabolic fashion--in the language of image and story.

Counseling as Ritual

Imber-Black and Roberts (1988, 37-38) point out that counseling itself is a ritual. It is carried out in a set-apart place with specific modes of preparation, and events which happen in an organized fashion. Counseling has a beginning and a closing. Recognizing the power of the ritualized environment of counseling, pastors should attend to the form, symbolism, and tone of the counseling event; to the arrangement of the space; the symbols present; the significance of times and dates; and to openings and

closings. These factors to consider in planning any ritual are considered in more detail in Chapter 4.

For instance, one pastor I know has four chairs around a wooden table decorated by a table cloth and a small vase of flowers. Family counseling happens around, or in the vicinity of, the table. The significance of the arrangement is obvious to the Christian pastor who offers the bread and wine to those gathered around the Communion table. The table in the pastor's office symbolizes the connection between the table of the Lord and the kitchen table around which the family gathers to eat daily bread. This setting contrasts with a setting in which the pastor sits in a chair behind his or her desk while family members sit on the other side of the desk in folding chairs.

As with any ritual, preparation is crucial to the desired result. Much of the unspoken (and sometimes more powerful) message is conveyed during the preparatory actions --dress, the making of the appointment, coffee, phone calls, initial conversations, home visits, and worship. In this regard, the pastoral counselor needs to hear Ramshaw's observation:

> At times when people need a sense of order or meaning, a handle on ambivalence or an approach to mystery, it may be the ritual authority of the pastor that draws them. . . . the minister's function as ritualizer colors all pastoral relationships, by holding out the possiblity of access to a symbolic world large enough and powerful enough to embrace the most

intractable events of life and death (Ramshaw 1987, 57).

The use of blessing, confession, prayer, communion, or even a song during counseling can serve a dual function. These practices offer reassurance to participants of the Holy Spirit's presence in counseling and serve as healthy models for the constructive use of ritual. Including religious ceremony in the counseling event is a tangible demonstration of the presence of God. As the family members struggle with the need to change and with unresolved loss, it might be helpful to pause at appropriate times for silent prayer. The pastor might also want to plan rituals to begin or end future counseling sessions. These rituals might include the sharing of the Eucharist, or the lighting of a candle accompanied by appropriate words from Scripture. However, the pastoral counselor must be careful not to interrupt healthy tension which often leads to new insight for family members. Perhaps at some point in the counseling, family members will want to plan a ceremony to mark some change, loss, or progress in the healing process. Ralph Underwood emphasizes the need for straightforward religious ritual during counseling: "Although effective pastoral counseling from a dynamic point of view can virtually constitute confession, without a definite ritual that includes absolution, counseling often is little more than catharsis" (Underwood 1993, 81).

Resistance to Change

Sometimes lasting change requires that the whole family system undergo radical transformation. Since family rituals are key elements in holding the system together, even across generations, family members need to give some serious consideration to the exploration and modification of these rituals. When using rituals to support positive change, pastoral counselors should take care to consult with other counseling professionals involved in helping the family.

Family members will most likely staunchly defend family rituals even if they do not work well or are no longer useful. The family members are often not aware of their efforts to resist change. Osterhaus makes the following comment regarding the resistance to change:

> We all fear extensive changes--changes that involve the map--because our emotional security is bound up with the intactness of the map. We have carefully constructed it over the years. We will not yield easily to its being altered (Osterhaus 1989, 59).

Kenneth Mitchell contends that families will resist change even to seemingly insignificant family rituals (Mitchell 1989, 70). This resistance is especially true of families that have rigid rituals. Instead of changing with circumstances, rituals become even more rigid in order to protect what is familiar. The unconscious assumption is that if it worked in the past, it will work forever. In order to protect the myth, family members deny that a crisis

exists, and pretend that all is well (Palazzoli et al. 1977, 448). Changing long-held family rituals is like dying to oneself and being raised to new life. It is not an easy process. At times, the family will echo the words of Jesus from the cross: "'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'" (Mark 15:34, New Revised Standard Version)

Overcoming Resistance

While ritual may be used by the family to thwart change, the use of ritual by the pastoral counselor may seem to the family like the least threatening avenue to change. Exploring new rituals with which to experiment gives family members permission to treasure the historic family rituals while playing with new rituals. One of the key aspects that prevents the family from feeling unduly threatened is the atmosphere of exploration and experimentation.

Jesus often met with resistance and opposition from certain sectors, He overcame resistance to change both by himself acting out historic rituals in a new way, and by challenging people through His words and actions to adopt radically different rituals. Mary sat down to listen to Jesus instead of serving her guest; the "Good Samaritan" stopped to help the injured Jew; Jesus healed people and ate grain on the Sabbath; He ate with sinners and tax collectors; and He radically changed the significance of Passover. When people asked Jesus about the right way to

live or about relationships, He told a story or parable; or used a symbol such as a child, a seed, or a loaf of bread. The stories and symbols demanded revised patterns of perception and of living. Once people heard a parable, their former pattern of response to similar situations could no longer be viewed in quite the same way. Even if the family does not continue with the new ritual which they have adopted in counseling, they will now have a wider repertoire of possible responses from which to choose. They will have experienced a new pattern of relating to one another a new openness to change will exist (Myerhoff 1982, 131).

Because change is so threatening, Peggy Papp reminds counselors of the importance of involving family members in the creation of new rituals which are somehow a natural extension of the family. She states: "their imagination and creativity are used as essential elements in the self-healing ceremonies" (Papp 1988, v). The pastor can use ritual to initiate a rearrangement of interactive patterns and provide the family with a sanctioned method of practicing the new pattern. Families can more easily initiate change when change occurs in the name of experimentation. As Laird suggests, this method allows intervention from the outside while preserving the family's power to choose:

> Therapeutic prescriptions hold much more potential for change if they are presented in repetitive, ritualized ways, ways that con-

> tain drama and demand attention. . . . Such rituals may be designed to undo a limiting or destructive family myth, help a family bridge a transition, or move a family toward a more complete resolution of loss (Laird 1990, 116-117).

Specific Approaches within the Counseling Session

Ritual can be used in a variety of ways as part of the counseling session. This chapter selects for discusion three specific suggestions for ritual: sculpting, confession and absolution, and the examination of current family rituals. As mentioned earlier in this paper, even the simplest daily rituals often reflect family patterns. As with any counseling method or tool, the pastoral counselor must tailor specific exercises to the needs of the counselees and must use these tools with great care. If the pastoral counselor discovers serious emotional problems, psychotic behaviors, signs of substance abuse, family violence, or other complex problems during this or any other ritual exercise, he or she will want to refer the family to other resources while continuing to offer support.

Sculpting

The counselor might ask one member of the family to describe briefly one of the family's daily rituals, followed by the sculpting of the ritual by another family member. Sculpting involves asking a particular family member to position other family members as if they were sculptures.

This process would include: the molding of facial expressions, placing other family members in groupings to indicate how they interact with one another, and the positioning of arms and legs to express typical behaviors and emotions. This approach would work well with children, and in families where there is a "scapegoat."

Confession and Absolution

In some instances, the service for private confession and absolution might be helpful in the midst of, or at the conclusion of marriage or family counseling. Pastor Prehn relates that he has taken the couple or family to the altar in the church for mutual confession and absolution, especially in cases where there has been mutual blame and no one is taking responsibility. Pastor Prehn describes another example of the use of confession and absolution in the context of counseling:

> I had the chance one time [to help] two people who were related by marriage. [The] in-laws [were] not getting along with each other. In fact, real hatred and arguing and all kinds of things were going on. I had seen each one individually and I decided it was time to get them together and I said, "This is foolish to be seeing each one of you individually," and they agreed to come together. . . . I had them write down their responsibility and how they were accountable for the estrangement. Then I took a metal wastebasket I had, and put it in the middle of the room. I lit [the] two pieces of paper on fire, and they became ashes in the bottom of the wastebasket. And I said, "That's it. It's all over with. We're done." And they each had such surprised looks on their faces. They couldn't believe that maybe that was it--that was their confession and the absolution that I

> pronounced took care of it. Amazing what happened to knit those families together again (Prehn 1993).

Important aspects of this example which set it apart from magic are: Prehn had a counseling relationship with the couple, had talked with the two sets of in-laws separately first, and conducted the ritual in the context of joint counseling with both sets of in-laws. Prehn use of ritual in this instance to render concrete that which had occurred in the context of pastoral counseling. Rarely, if ever, would if be appropriate for the pastor to use a ritual involving confession or absolution at the outset of the counseling relationship.

An antiphonal confession-absolution ritual might prove valuable in families in which there is considerable fingerpointing with little recognition of individual responsibility. This ritual ought to be practiced first in the counseling session since most people will be unfamiliar with formulating original confessions and absolutions. Practice is also essential to ensure that the confession is truly antiphonal, that is, balanced with no one member doing all the confessing and another conducting the absolution. The pastor might assist the family choosing particular days and times to light a candle and read a specific Scripture. If carried out in the correct manner, this ritual would draw the "scapegoat" into a more accepted role in the family system, encourage family members to accept mutual

responsibility, and draw the family away from the struggle for power.

The counselor must of course be very sensitive to the possibility of sexual molestion or abuse within the family when considering the use of any ritual involving confession and absolution. Marie Fortune points out that the Church and pastoral counselors are often too quick to "forgive." This "cheap grace" does not recognize the need for a realization of guilt and true repentance on the part of the offender. This kind of mock forgiveness does not promote real healing, but rather supports a denial of the serious nature of abuse. Fortune issues words of caution and advice to clergypersons in dealing with cases of possible sexual molestation:

> If an offender confesses, which is relatively rare, the clergyperson or other professional can use the occasion to direct the offender to make a report to the authorities as a means of holding the offender accountable. The minister can and should withhold absolution until steps have been taken that clearly indicate the offender's genuine repentance and change.
>
> Unless clergy and other professionals have the means to (1) protect the victim from further abuse and (2) stop the abuser and hold him or her accountable, they need to call upon resources in the community that have the authority and the means to achieve these two goals (Fortune 1991, 81).

Fortune expresses a similar caution in relation to the clergy's response to those who batter their spouse (Fortune 1991, 134-135).

Modification of Current Family Rituals

The counselor could have family members describe a daily ritual in detail while the counselor records the description on audio or video tape. The family could then play the tape back as part of the counseling session, looking for who has which role, where the boundaries are, who speaks and who is quiet, and the inconsistencies. The counselor will need to encourage all members to participate in this exercise. Based on the discoveries expressed by family members, changes could perhaps be made in the the time, location, or role assignments of a particular ritual. After some counseling has occurred, and family members acquire a degree of insight into some needed changes in the family system, they need to choose the ritual to be modified, and reach agreement concerning the desired alterations. This process would provide a relatively "safe," controlled space in which to initiate change.

Giving the family "homework" is often a helpful counseling practice. Once some of the problems are identified, the counselor might want to enlist the family's assistance in creating activity patterns which have the potential of being refined and developed into a new rituals. The pastor will want to consider involving members of the extended family in this creative process. Palazzoli et al. have found this use of ritual helpful clinically:

> The use of systemic models in family therapy obliged our team to devise therapeutic tasks involving the entire family. Among these, one was found to be extremely effective: the prescribing of a family ritual (Palazzoli et al. 1977, 445).

J. C. Wynn agrees:

> I search for some activity they have not tried for some time: a whole-family picnic, a visit to some congenial relative, planning an event such as a vacation together, or even--if it is unusual for them--eating dinner together. On this they are to report back at the next session two weeks or so in the future (Wynn 1991, 67).

The pastoral caregiver needs to incorporate changes suggested by the family into the new ritual that family members can then practice between counseling appointments.

Examining a prescribed ritual gives birth to a recognition of reality. In a sense, the family begins to see the world and their interactions through new lenses. This new perspective promotes an opening to change (Palazzoli et al. 1977, 451). The pastor might consider requesting family members to keep individual diaries as they practice the "experimental" ritual. The pastoral counselor needs to remember that many people, particularly in dysfunctional family systems, will find it difficult to put their feelings into words. Because of this difficulty, the counselor who asks that members keep a diary needs to be extremely careful to affirm the various reactions and feelings, as well as suggestions for the revision of the ritual, as they are discussed during a follow-up counseling

session. At the same time, the pastoral counselor needs to help family members recognize destructive family patterns.

Hello and Good-bye Rituals

It might be good to start with a daily ritual such as hellos and good-byes. Some families have no "hello/good-bye" rituals--members simply come and go with no rituals for leaving or reentry. The absence of such rituals is often a sign of a fractured or loosely knit family with poor communication patterns. The pastoral caregiver might want to help the family develop appropriate "hello/good-bye" rituals which family members feel would be comfortable for them. Imber-Black and Roberts comment: "Touching base with each other in a daily ritual of 'hello' or 'good-bye' can provide an opening, and a place to notice changes in one another that might be missed" (Imber-Black and Roberts 1992, 147).

Odd and Even Day Rituals

Many family therapists use "odd/even day" rituals in counseling. Family members trade roles and behaviors with another family member on alternating days--utilizing the other's parenting techniques, sitting in the other's seat during meals, or assuming their household duties (Whiting 1988, 94-95). This practice is, of course, the proverbial "walking a mile in the someone else's moccasins." Swapping roles can be particularly effective in cases of

"scapegoating" or when family members seem deaf to each other's "stories."

Scripture

The pastor might offer a list of Scripture passages from which family members select a reading that relates to their situation. During the counseling session, each member can then contribute his or her reasons for choosing the passage. A particular family member then reads aloud the passage in the presence of the whole family each day for a couple of weeks at a chosen time of day, followed by a specified period of silent prayer. It is important that family members not discuss the Scripture passage in the absence of the pastoral counselor. Limiting the discussion to the counseling setting prevents certain members of the family from using their interpretation of the Scripture as a "weapon" to keep other members engrained in the existent systemic patterns. After participating in this ritual for the specified period of time, family relationships could be discussed again at a counseling session in light of the Scripture reading. This ritual could help the family members develop the practice of listening to each other, reading Scripture together, and setting aside a time to let the Spirit move in and through their daily interactions.

Conclusion

The symbolic and experiential nature of rituals allows families to feel blessed as they "test the waters," practicing new patterns of relating and coping. Family members are able to maintain a sense of control in the midst of confusion and change.

In the event that a more healthy level of interaction is reached, new rituals created jointly by the pastoral counselor and family members, will reinforce and assist in maintaining the new pattern of relating. Some kind of ceremony should be planned to bless these new rituals (Imber-Black 1988, 81). When the family has begun to feel comfortable with a significant new ritual, family members might want to choose particular members of the community of faith to help celebrate the new level of relating within the family. This celebration could take the form of the renewal of wedding vows, confession and absolution, a dinner with the presentation of symbols which represent the progress made, or a general blessing of the family.

The present chapter has suggested some specific characteristics for the pastoral counselors to observe regarding family rituals as they assess the dynamics of family systems, as well creative ideas for the use of ritual in promoting healing within families. Since rituals are so important in relationships and creating new rituals is a serious undertaking, Chapter 4 will address the various

factors the pastoral counselor must consider in helping the family grow in the use of ritual for promoting a healthy family system.

CHAPTER IV

PLANNING A RITUAL: FACTORS TO CONSIDER

There are many factors to be considered when planning a ritual, whether it be a religious ritual or a new daily ritual for the family. These factors might include location, time, dates, dress, participants, food, leadership, feelings, and the physical arrangement of the space (Imber-Black and Roberts 1992, 76-77). Even though Turner is describing the rituals of "primitive" societies, many of the items on the following list apply to the planning of a family ritual:

> Each kind of ritual, ceremony, or festival comes to be coupled with special types of attire, music, dance, food and drink, "properties",[sic] modes of staging and presentation, physical and cultural environment, and, often, masks, body-painting, headgear, furniture, and shrines (Turner 1982, 12).

Preparation

The preparation stage of a ritual is often crucial to the effect and effectiveness of the actual ceremony. Imber-Black and Roberts point out: "In the planning, many relationships are defined, issues are worked through, and pieces of new roles tried on" (Imber-Black and Roberts 1992, 23). Strassfeld's statement about the Jewish Passover describes an aspect of all rituals: "[The] greater the sense of preparation for Passover, the more we become

cognizant of the holiday's approach and we are confronted with the holiday's themes" (Strassfeld 1985, 10). Strassfeld describes a long list of details to be taken care of in preparation for the Passover, including not only the disposal of all hametz (leavened bread), but also a burning of the remaining hametz on the first morning of Passover as well as a formal declaration that no more hametz remains in the house (Strassfeld 1985, 9). The preparations for the Passover are particularly detailed and formal due to its long history, however, in general, careful preparations are part of the formation of a ritual's meanings.

Preparation can be as important to the healing process, and as supportive to the family as the actual ritual. Indeed, preparation for the central ritual becomes an integral part of the ceremony. In the case of the Passover Seder, the various detailed preparations have in themselves actually become highly developed rituals which ensure that all is ready for the central ritual of the ceremonial meal. In a like manner, the preparations for various family rituals are many times themselves ritualized, and may perhaps themselves become highly organized rituals in their own right.

The work that family members together must invest to prepare for a ritual is in itself valuable. For example, the impact of preparation on the tenor and effect of the celebration is apparent in the decorating, baking, wrapping,

and planning that occurs in families just before Christmas. In the case of the new rituals initiated as a result of counseling, members may be listening to each other and really attempting to work together for the first time. In many ways, preparation alone begins to effect changes in the family dynamics (Whiting 1988, 91). The central ceremony then becomes a symbol of their new relational pattern, a pattern shaped during the preparation stage.

Location and Physical Arrangement

The location and physical arrangement of the space chosen to enact the ritual are important factors to consider in creating or conducting a ritual to commemorate a specific event or situation. In some cases even the daily rituals of the family are deeply affected by the spacial arrangements. Does the location have the desired symbolism for all members of the family? Is it connected to special memories? Can the space chosen accomodate the actions planned, and the desired number and type of participants? How will the place be chosen, and how will it be prepared, and by whom? Is it suitable for children, elderly, or disabled persons who might be in attendance? Does the location have counterproductive associations for some members of the family? These are only some of the questions which one might want to consider in choosing the location for a blessing, a healing ritual, confession and absolution,

ritual of release, or the renewal of wedding vows (Imber-Black and Roberts 1992, 98-99).

The ritual may convey a significantly different message if it is conducted in the kitchen as opposed to the living room, or at church instead of in the home. It might even be advisable to begin in one place and then move to another for a different part of the ceremony. Moving from one location to another might be especially effective for rituals involving grief, or confession and absolution--rituals of letting go. The physical movement symbolizes and concretizes the movement from one focus in life to another (Cameron 1991, 6).

Timing

The time and date of the ritual are also important. Will it be in the evening or morning, be completed in fifteen minutes or extend over days with a small portion of the ritual being completed each day? How often and at what intervals should the ritual be repeated (Whiting 1988, 89)? Some rituals, particularly those created jointly by the family members and the pastor, may require three or four months lead time in order properly to plan and prepare the various aspects of the ceremony (Cameron 1991, 6). Richard Whiting states:

> Probably one of the most important concepts related to time has to do with marking the experience as distinct and different from the usual activities of daily living. This time

> boundary serves to highlight the experience as ritual time and in some instances makes the ritual more manageable (Whiting 1988, 89).

Whiting claims that it is easier for family members to participate within a prescribed block of time because this "special time" preserves the experimental nature of the ritual. Permission and freedom are given to experiment with new patterns of behavior and interaction within a space specifically set aside for this purpose (Whiting 1988, 90). Setting a specific time of day and length of time for many new or modified family rituals, particularly those aimed at enabling change or commemorating loss facilitates movement into new rules and behavior.

Symbols

Perhaps one of the most powerful aspects of any ritual are the symbols and symbolic actions employed in its enactment. The power and message of most rituals is not so much in the spoken words, but in the images and feelings evoked by symbols. Some of the possible symbols are photos, heirlooms or family treasures, particular types of food, pieces of clothing, or gifts (Wolin and Bennett 1984, 411). In describing his pastoral visits, Pastor Prehn suggests that leaving something tangible behind at the close of the visit renders the event "sacramental" in the sense that common objects invite the believer into communion with God. These tangible gifts could include: the sign of the cross

on the person's forehead, bread and wine (or grape juice), or a Sunday bulletin (Prehn 1993).

Characteristics of Symbols

There are a number of specific aspects that render symbols profoundly useful and powerful. First, symbols and symbolic actions practically fill every moment of daily life, but people are for the most part unaware of them (Imber-Black and Roberts 1992, 128). Second, the same symbol can be understood on different levels by different age groups. The meaning of symbols can change and be reinterpreted over time. Finally, the very form or structure of the ritual can become a symbol, carrying to the unconscious a powerful message about the worth of the participants or importance of the ceremony.

Symbols in Judaism

Judaism is a rich resource for those pastors who wish to explore the use of symbols in family rituals, since Jewish rituals contain many symbols. These symbols often have multiple interpretations. Many are geared to children's participation. In the Passover Seder, for example, matzah symbolizes liberation because it is the bread made in haste for travel; the Elijah chair stands for the hope for future redemption; and haroset reminds the participant of the mortar for the bricks made by the Israelites in slavery (Strassfeld 1985, 6-8, 17-18).

Strassfeld's The Jewish Holidays aids the pastoral caregiver in discovering the many complex layers of meaning which can be encapsulated in just one of these symbols (Strassfeld 1985, 38-40). Strassfeld states: "[That] is how symbols work, after all: raising questions we might never have asked, and so pointing us to answers we can never exhaust" (Strassfeld 1985, 8).

The Versatility and Power of Symbols

The versatility and communicative power of symbols suggests that pastors would be wise to consider utilizing symbols in the pastoral care and counseling of families. Regardless of whether the pastoral caregivers intentionally employ symbols and symbolic patterns in rituals, symbols are nevertheless present. Certainly, both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament support the use of symbols. Some examples of these Biblical symbols are: sheep, fire, a clay pot, goats, figs, marriage, a cross, water, bread and wine, seeds, etc. The power of symbols is demonstrated by simply reading the preceding list. Most Christians who have been taught the stories which contain these symbols will find it virtually impossible to block out the messages and truths the symbols represent. Much of the meaning of these symbols cannot be translated adequately into words. Family systems also have symbols which trigger powerful memories and stories.

Roles of Participants and Leaders

When helping a family to plan or revise a ritual, the pastor needs to examine closely the list of participants and their respective roles. Meaningful participation by everyone in the family is important, including children and the elderly. With their stories, symbols, high level of activity and "magical" quality, rituals can easily be constructed to include and appeal to children (Imber-Black and Roberts 1992, 95). The introductory comments to the Roman Catholic "Order for the Annual Blessing of Families in Their Own Homes" states: "The celebrant's manner of presiding at the celebration should manifest the attentive concern of charity toward all present, particularly the young, the elderly, and the sick" (National Conference of Catholic Bishops 1989, 13). Women often bear a heavier load of the responsibility for the preparation, details and significance of rituals in the family. Often men assume that it is the role of women to assume this responsibility while men stand at the edge of, or outside the ritual experience. Adult family members often leave children out or give them an insignificant part, unless children are the focus of a specific ritual (Imber-Black and Roberts 1992, 92).

Beginnings and Endings

Beginnings and endings are also crucial to the effectiveness of ritual. In this respect, it is extemely important that the pastoral caregiver pay attention to the manner in which guests and participants are welcomed and led into the aura of ritual, and what is done to close off the ritual space. Clergy must also ensure that everyone knows when the ritual moment has ended, and yet still inspire participants to carry a piece of the experience with them into the various patterns of daily living (Imber-Black and Roberts 1992, 102).

Flexibility

In order to provide families with an appropriate symbol for adjusting to the changes and transitions of life, rituals need to include permission and space for innovation and flexibility. Developing new rituals will do little good if these new rituals are not reshaped over time (Roberts 1988, 6). In addition to the need for flexibility, Christian rituals designed to be used with families also need to have a theologically sound framework. An overall outline for many family rituals of blessing can be gleaned from the Book of Blessings. The typical blessing includes: Introductory Rites, Readings from God's Word, Intercessory Prayer, the Prayer of Blessing, and the Concluding Rite (National Conference of Catholic Bishops

1989). Pastoral caregivers can readily modify this structure to serve as a framework for a variety of family rituals.

The Power of Nonverbal Factors

Symbolism, nonverbal gestures, and structure are crucial considerations in the creation and conduct of ritual. Inattention to time, place, preparation, the assigning of the various roles, and visual symbols is a grave mistake. The location chosen or the objects employed in the conduct of the ritual actually can convey a message contradictory to the spoken and intended meaning. The manner in which pastors welcome participants or conduct the ceremony leaves indelible images with families. Imagery is what rituals are all about. To be more specific: it makes a great deal of difference in the message of the ritual whether the minister comes to the house with the water to sprinkle in each room for the blessing of a dwelling or simply waves a hand over the house as a whole: whether the pastor arrives in suit and tie or alb and stole; whether the ceremony includes only adults or incorporates children as well; or whether the ceremony is conducted solely by an ordained clergyperson as opposed to inviting significant participation by family members. While my own values lean toward rendering the ceremony as significant and inclusive as possible, the primary question is not whether one choice

is more "right" than another. The crucial issue is that the pastor recognize the symbolic message conveyed by the manner in which the ritual is conducted. Otherwise, the pastor will neither effectively nor accurately convey the intended meaning or blessing to family members.

Conclusion

The preceding chapters have demonstrated that ritual is a wonderfully useful tool for assessing family systems, for promoting healing, for assisting families with life-cycle transitions, and for helping families to face a wide variety of changes ranging from relocation to broken relationships. I have also proposed that a variety of rituals are appropriate as a part of the counseling event, and that the counseling session is itself a ritual having order, structure, and symbols. Although some cautions were briefly introduced in Chapter 3, it might appear as if there are almost no limits to the use of ritual for the pastoral counseling and care of families. In order to dispel that myth, Chapter 5 describes several limits and cautions concerning the use of ritual.

CHAPTER V

CAUTIONS AND LIMITS

As with almost any tool or approach utilized in the care and counseling of families, the pastoral caregiver needs to take into consideration some limits and cautions when employing ritual for the support of families. This chapter names the more significant of these limits and cautions. The discussion will include: recognition of the need for referral, the encouragement of a dichotomy between the sacred and the secular, the danger of unintentionally blessing destructive patterns, the potential for the misinterpretation of symbols, and the danger of confusing ritual with magic.

The Need for Referral

If the family system is seriously dysfunctional or there are several complex issues, the pastoral caregiver will want to refer the family to other professionals because of the typical congregational pastor's lack of time and minimal training in family therapy. The revising of deeply rooted rituals can be a very time-consuming task. Clergy members more appropriately use ritual to provide valuable support and assistance in the healing process as well as offering ongoing support following the cessation of therapy.

Deeply Rooted Rituals

Particularly in those families with very rigid rituals, initiating changes in long-practiced patterns of interaction within the family may be very difficult. Change will involve careful advance preparation by the pastor and often some emotional pain for the family (Imber-Black and Roberts 1992, 68). The pattern may be resistant to change due to some powerful underlying reasons for denying a need to change. Often the desire to retain a rigid system of rituals is the result of unresolved loss, an embarrassing family secret, or a pattern of violence. Family members grow to fear that the family unit will fall apart as a result of any revision in the system of closely followed rituals. Even when family members recognize the current pattern of behavior as unpleasant and meaningless, change may be difficult since the present ritual is familiar territory. At least the problems and pain are somewhat predictable. To change means to step into the unknown, and to acknowledge that hurt or guilt within the family is a reality. Although ritual is an effective tool to use in initiating change or dealing with past losses, the journey will still be difficult. Several factors can contribute to the difficulty people have in changing rituals. Bossard and Boll point to the rooting of rituals in the unconscious:

> Because of the nature of family rituals--
> their recurrence, the sense of rightness
> which accompanies them, the pleasurable

> associations--they groove themselves deeply and pleasantly into the accumulating layers of the youthful mind, which constitutes the essence of the unconscious (Bossard and Boll 1950, 198).

Families even find it hard to leave behind rituals that reinforce the unpleasant, because they have represented the accepted manner in which to react to a particular set of circumstances. Loving parent figures often authorize and promulgate rituals which have outlived their constructive usefulness. It becomes difficult for the child to abandon this frame of reference provided by parent figures who constitute the child's whole universe, even when he or she becomes an adult.

Patterns of Abuse

Many times very complex and powerfully binding family-generated rituals develop around aberrations within the family. These aberrations include child and spouse abuse, sexual molestation, child molestation, elder abuse, incest, rape, and substance abuse. The family system structured around these various patterns of abuse develops a whole array of skewed rituals in order to enable its members to cope, while retaining the pattern of abuse. These rituals become an integral part of the lens through which family members view the world. The fact that family members return to well-known but destructive patterns, many times even after their efforts to the contrary, is a demonstration

of the power of ritualized behavior (Wynn 1991, 34). The family's enslavement to these destructive behavior patterns is also testimony to the power of the well-rehearsed reactions in society that perpetuate the denial of the violence that occurs in many families.

Westerhoff and Willimon state: "Our homes are where we have our primary and most formative experiences of God and God's love through the family" (Westerhoff and Willimon 1980, 138). If one combines this formative influence with the fact that the home can also represent the most fearful and disgusting perversions of the image of God, born out of abuse and neglect, it is obvious that one needs to be cautious about the blessings and prayers which are said in the home and all locations where families are participants in ritual. J. C. Wynn points out that repeated instances of sexual molestation or abuse can become a tremendously destructive ritual, causing child victims to adopt similar patterns as adults. Child victims may unwittingly find themselves reenacting in adulthood the ritual they sought to escape as children (Wynn 1991, 144-145). Pastors must avoid enabling an offender through the careless use of ritual in the home or the church.

Imber-Black and Roberts complain that there are not enough rituals which celebrate or facilitate healing for the victims of assault, abuse or various forms of family violence (Imber-Black and Roberts 1992, 36-37). The

pastoral caregiver can be instrumental in engendering a sense of connectedness and support on the part of the victims of family violence by helping victims to create rituals to express anguish, or planning occasions to celebrate healing. The ideal would be to include representatives of the congregation, but if this is not desired by the victim the pastor serves as a representative of both God and the family of God by nature of her or his ordination or leadership role in worship. The Sunday worship service can also include a prayer for the victims of family violence.

The pastoral counselor must be careful not to imply or insist that reconciliation is the only possible outcome of family counseling. Reconciliation may not be possible or desireable in cases in which family violence is an issue. Prayers and other rituals during the counseling process must be worded in such a way as not to further entrap any victims of family violence.

For instance, it is not helpful for a battered wife to confess these words from a divorce ritual contained in Liturgy and Learning Through the Life Cycle: "I acknowledge that my sins have contributed to the death of our marriage, and I pray Almighty God to have mercy on me and forgive me all my sins" (Westerhoff and Willimon 1980, 125). That same ritual contains the following: "We release you from those promises made before God and the community in

your marriage vows that we may uphold you as (a) single person(s) beloved by God" (Westerhoff and Willimon 1980, 126). These words of release could serve as an affirmation for the victim, but could also be construed by the offender as absolution without the need for repentence. Perhaps the pastor and key representatives from the congregation could utilize these words of release during a blessing held at the newly established (away from the abuser) residence of the survivor(s) of abuse. This would serve as a powerful symbol of community support for the survivor(s).

As a preventive measure, the pastor could utilize the blessing of a marriage or of a home to stress the mutual worth and mutual submission of both partners in the marital relationship from the very beginning of the union. Scripture texts such as I Peter 5:5, Romans 12:10, Philippians 2:3, or Ephesians 5:21 could be incorporated into the ritual. Prayers that are a part of the Catholic service for the Blessing of Children recognize the reality of child abuse: "Even as a child you [Lord Jesus] had to undergo persecution and exile; grant that all children who are victims of the evil of our times may find help and protection" (National Conference of Catholic Bishops 1989, 48).

Lack of Insight

Palazzoli and associates advise that families often have difficulty recognizing a mythical pattern which has existed for generations. Family members have even more difficulty accepting an invitation to open rebellion against a myth that they perceive to be holding the family together. An alternative is for the counselor to recognize the myth and then to prescribe a trial ritual which gradually transforms the pattern of interaction (Palazzoli et al. 1977, 449). If the pattern of interaction is too deeply embedded, the pastoral counselor may need to refer the family to a family therapist.

Unintended Effects of Rituals

Chapter 4 included a fairly thorough examination of the various factors that the pastor must take into consideration when planning a ritual, because it is vital that the rituals conducted by pastors fulfill the purposes for which they are intended. Some unintended results of the rituals conducted to offer support to families might include: the encouragement of a dichotomy between the secular and sacred spheres within the family, a pronouncement of blessing upon the destructive patterns the pastor actually intends to discourage, and conveying the wrong messages through the careless use of symbols.

Dichotomy between the Sacred and the Secular

Utilizing ritual for the support of families has the potential to bring the power of the sacred into the everyday lives of families. However, the pastoral caregiver must also recognize the possibility of unintentionally creating a dichotomy between the secular and the sacred in the family system. For instance, the family activities that have been blessed--for which a ritual has been celebrated--might mistakenly be considered "holy ground" while other parts of the family system remain off limits to the transforming love of God. A more general dichotomy between religious rituals and the daily family rituals has existed for generations. Family members attend Church on Sunday to experience the presence of God, and then return to their homes to beat their wives, put down their children, and generally behave as if God does not even exist. The danger in celebrating religious rituals in the home is that the pastor will send the message to families that only certain parts of the family system are blessed with the presence of God, while other areas are off limits to God. The risk of creating a dichotomy between the sacred and the secular within the home, however, is more desireable than the present dichotomy in which the Church is viewed as the sacred domain. In contrast, the family is seen as a private domain far from the transforming love of God.

Blessing a Curse

The pastor needs to be extremely careful not to unintentionally place a blessing on a symbol, behavioral trait, or pattern of interaction which needs to be abandoned. For instance, praising the life-long commitment between husband and wife in the celebration of the anniversary of a marriage might at first seem always appropriate. However, the minister may be in fact blessing physical or psychological abuse in the relationship of the couple being blessed. Implying the unconditional permanency of the marriage bond may also carry a message of condemnation for other participants and observers who are living in an abusive relationship. Pastors must be sensitive and responsible about what is ushered into the realm of the holy through ritual, and what is purposely excluded by way of that same ritual.

The pastoral caregiver might also unwittingly pronounce a blessing upon the various forms of abusive behavior by blessing a home or family unit despite the caregiver's suspicions of substance or battering. This denial of the reality of the abusive behavior serves as permission for the behavior to continue unchecked. In situations of domestic violence, emotional abuse, or substance abuse, the pastor needs to refuse to bless the destructive pattern. Somewhere in the prayers or introductory rites of the ceremony, the leader needs to include a disclaimer which recognizes the

propensity of sin to cause distorted relationships, even within the family. The ritual needs to incorporate this recognition of the possibility of destructive family patterns even if the present family system is healthy. The admission of the reality of sin will serve as an encouragement to any observers who may be living in an abusive system. The mention of the suffering existent in other families will also serve as a reminder to the healthy family that "breaking the silence" is necessary in order to empower hurting family members to seek help (Fortune 1991, 204).

Misinterpretation of Symbols

Pastors must be cautious when using ritual with families in which one or more of the members has a history of psychological problems. In certain instances the troubled family member may need to obtain therapy as preparation for the ritual, or the minister may need to alter the ritual to avoid triggering counterproductive responses. Elaine Ramshaw suggests that when a mentally disturbed family member will be present, the leader of ritual must attempt to ascertain the meaning of certain symbols before utilizing them in the ritual in order to discern what is meaningful and affirming (Ramshaw 1987, 83). The pastor needs always to be aware of the family's interpretation of the symbols used with the family, but the

family members' perceptions of specific symbols are of crucial import when a history of psychological problems is a factor.

Ritual Is Not Magic

One final caution that needs to be voiced in this paper is that ritual should not be thought of as magic or a quick fix. The pastor is responsible for ensuring that ritual is not perceived as such. Ritual is rather a way to encourage the family toward healing and to a "safe" space for experimentation with change. Ritual needs to develop within a pastoral relationship with the family, particularly in response to difficulties in the family system. Ritual brings a sense of hope in the face of death, suicide, or other loss by providing closure in the midst of the family's sense that the residual effects of the crisis leave the family permanently paralyzed (Cameron 1991, 3-4). Families must never be led to believe that because the home has been blessed that all threat of evil has somehow been taken away: "Rituals are typically done over a period of time and modified with therapeutic setbacks and gains. They are not seen as quick and simple solutions to therapeutic problems" (Whiting 1988, 94). Although a powerful tool, ritual is not to be used as if it were the only tool at the pastor's disposal (Underwood 1993, 81).

Conclusion

In summary, ritual is not a tool which can be used indiscriminately in the care of families. Ritual is a powerful tool, and must be used carefully. Good intentions are not enough since the pastor could inadvertently cause harm, while attempting to introduce healing. Pastors need to take into consideration the unintended messages a particular ritual may send to participants and observers, and carefully mold the ritual in a way that accurately conveys the intended message.

CHAPTER VI

THE SHAPE OF THE CHURCH:

WHAT IS THE MESSAGE FOR FAMILIES?

> [For] most families, the church has been one of the most central locations for family ritual, a place where families can mark their most important events, sharing not only their weekly worship and spiritual meanings but their social and family-life transitions in community with others. (Laird 1990, 110)

Even those families whose members are not regular attenders of any church will often look to the Church for rituals to mark the transitions in life. Both rites of passage and weekly worship services offer opportunities for the Church to develop rituals which support a healthy pattern for families.

Correlation of Message and Model

In order effectively to proclaim a healthy model of interaction for families, the pastoral leader must remember that the way in which the ritual is conducted, the participants who are involved, the structure of the ritual, the arrangement of the space, and the symbols employed often say more than the actual words spoken. Sunday worship, fellowship dinners, Sunday School Christmas programs, and even committee meetings are all ritual. Since these gatherings all involve ritual, symbolism and imagery are the key conveyors of meaning. Leaders of worship and of

committee meetings often speak the message of good news for all. However, a somewhat conflicting message is often proclaimed through the rigid structure, and exclusiveness of the ritual. Elaine Ramshaw stresses that leadership in worship plays a key role in pastoral care:

> It is my conviction that the paradigmatic act of pastoral care is the act of presiding at the worship of the gathered community, and that this priority in no way contravenes the importance of the one-on-one, "private," counseling-oriented dimension of pastoral care . . . . the pastoral act of liturgical leadership supports this as well as other dimensions of pastoral caring, giving them the focus and experiential quality that clearly defines them as "pastoral" (Ramshaw 1987, 14).

Leaders of worship, or of other rituals in the church, need to be sensitive to the paradigm which is being communicated to families. Westerhoff and Willimon comment: "The Sunday liturgy of the church and in particular the actions persons perform during that ritual express and shape their perceptions, understandings, and ways of life" (Westerhoff and Willimon 1980, 41).

Through the rituals of the church, families hear that God claims and loves them. Leaders and congregation speak words of repentance and forgiveness, share peace, and pray for the needs of others (Stewart 1979, 169). The leader of the ritual needs to ensure that the actions and symbols of worship support the verbal message. Ralph Underwood offers this reminder:

> Ministers have available to them not only influential words but the power of the Spirit, which communicates not only in words, however important they may be, but also in symbolic acts, in the ritual (Underwood 1993, 79).

The repetition of Sunday worship, in tandom with the religious significance, contributes to the power of the ritual. The leader of worship needs to reevaluate the format of, participation in, and symbols utilized for the congregation's rituals. Do the pattern and format of those rituals model healthy family patterns? Are certain types of people "scapegoated," slotted into certain roles, or excluded from certain components of the ritual? Do the format and symbolism of the church's rituals reinforce our denial of dehumanizing stereotypes or challenge them?

Physical Arrangement of Worship: Impact on Family Structure

The physical arrangement of the space in which the church's rituals take place carries a powerful message for families. Straight rows of pews which cannot be moved, facing a raised platform from which a male leader orchestrates the actions of all the others who are seated on the lower level, speaks a message about God's relationship to family members and the patterns of relating with one another. The message may not be spoken, but perhaps more powerful because of the subtle nature of symbol. What does

this physical arrangement imply for the structure of the family system? Compare the above arrangement with a worship space which has movable chairs arranged in varying patterns close around the altar with the chairs arranged so the members of the congregation can see each other during worship. The chancel is filled with people of all ages and both genders serving communion, reading lessons and preaching sermons.

I maintain that a connection exists between the arrangement of the worship space, and the structure of families. I am proposing that the first arrangement reinforces a rigid family structure with hierarchical leadership. In contrast, the second model promotes shared leadership and flexibility.

Worship Format: Stability and Flexibility

Likewise, if the worship format is not flexible, rigidity is reinforced in family systems. Adaptability to change needs to be modeled in the format of the worship service as an encouragement for families to view change as normal, and flexibility as desireable. Flexibility in the pattern of worship sends the message to the family that their problems can be addressed in innovative ways, and that relationships within the family system are a kaleidoscope. Flexibility does not spell destruction, but rather gives birth to adaptability and beauty.

Worship can become an opportunity for families to observe that stability can be maintained in the midst of change. Even though various parts of the order of service change, worshippers experience God's presence, and hear God's Good News of rescue. The teenager who reads the Gospel Lesson, and the female pastor who preaches the sermon read and preach a similar message that has been proclaimed for two thousand years. Families observe that the Church can institute changes and thrive, while still maintaining its core identity as the Body of Christ. Church and family both need that healthy mix of stability and flexibility in order to face change constructively, and in order to speak faithfully to the present generation.

Examples of both flexibility and stability in religious rituals can be observed in the celebration of many of the Jewish holidays. Even though there are relatively elaborate preparations and stylized patterns of ritual prescribed for the proper observance of many of the holidays, families are encouraged to adapt and interpret the rituals in order that the rituals are both meaningful and enjoyable (Strassfeld 1985). This freedom to adapt historic rituals obviously has not resulted in the disappearance of these rituals, since many of them have been observed for thousands of years. The same is true for many of the traditions of the Christian Church.

Inclusiveness

Participation in worship leadership is probably one of the most powerful symbols for families. Utilizing people of all genders and ages in worship leadership provides an inclusive model for the family, and encourages a democratic pattern of decision making. Inclusiveness in the church's rituals empowers all family members to consider themselves persons of worth with important contributions to make to the life of the family.

Illustrations

I maintain that the level of inclusiveness in the church's rituals provides an extremely powerful model for family systems. Consider and compare the following three illustrations:

> Illustration A:
> The presiding minister is a 35-year-old ordained woman, and mother of two children. The assisting minister is a single layperson in his late 50's with slightly graying hair. The assistant chants a significant portion of the liturgy, assists with Communion, and leads the intercessory prayers. The lector, who is an 18-year-old young woman just finishing her senior year in high school, reads two of the lessons. The acolyte is 12 years old. His or her job is to light the candles, and assist with Communion and Baptisms. The four combination ushers and greeters consist of a 60-year-old grandmother, a single father in his 30's, a 17-year-old young woman, and a 40-year-old single woman. A silver-haired widow and a 20-year-old man assist with the distribution of Communion. Members who are ten years of age or older, and have attended special classes, may receive Communion.
>
> Illustration B:
> The presiding minister is a 45-year-old man with two

children. He chants both the presiding minister's and the assisting minister's portion of the liturgy. Only sporadically is there a lay reader. This same minister distributes both the bread and wine to worshippers. In this branch of the denomination, only men are permitted to be ordained. The acolyte is a 17-year-old young woman. The four ushers are all middle-aged men. Only those who have completed two years of instruction and have affirmed their faith can receive Communion. This most often happens at around age fifteen.

Illustration C:
The presiding minister is a man by denominational rule and is the sole leader of worship, except for the distribution of Communion when a layman (again a man by denominational rule) assists. Children are present for only part of the service, and then are taken to "children's church" in another building. Infant baptism and infant Communion are practiced.

The symbolic effects of various worship configurations on the family become obvious as the pastor considers these models of worship in the context of providing pastoral care to families. Recognizing the likely connection becomes even more important when one considers that worship patterns are experienced on a regular basis over years, particularly by those family members who are frequent churchgoers. In addition, these models of relating are backed by Church authority.

The Role of Women in the Greek Orthodox Church

The Greek Orthodox Church has a particularly restrictive doctrine concerning the receiving of commuion by women who have recently given birth. The Reverend Father D. Stavroforos Mamaies outlines the process of cleansing that

must occur prior to a new mother's readmittance to the Eucharist:

> As far as when a woman is going to have a baby, we visit her on the ninth day at the hospital and there's a blessing that takes place for the mother and child. Then there's the forty-day blessing when the mother brings the child here to the church, and she is allowed reentry into the church. We go back to the Jewish customs of the sense of the purification ritual. Certain time elapses had to take place. . . . She doesn't receive Communion until then either, going with the Jewish notion of purification (Mamales 1993).

There is no similar "barring" from Communion for the father, or males for any reasons. This practice provides a model for the family concerning the role and acceptability of women, as well as the concept that somehow birth is ritually unclean.

As one would expect, the Greek Orthodox Church excludes women from any kind of leadership role in public worship. Mamales describes this exclusion of women from leadership in worship:

> The distribution of the sacrament of Communion would only be by an ordained clergyman. That could be a priest or a deacon. For us a deacon is a full-fledged clergyman. . . . In days of old, the chanters did the whole liturgy, but now we have the choirs, men and women. Women do not participate sacramentally because their role is not that of the clergy. First and foremost, we know that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ came as a male. I know that it was a male-dominated world. If he came as a female, nobody would've listened to him. I've heard that argument, but I think it goes a little bit deeper than that. The relationship between Christ and God in the Trinitarian formula--He could have called

> His God "mother," but He chose to call Him "Father," and there's certain reasons for that. Because the father, the male is the cause and the woman is the receptacle. I feel that women can be more spiritual than men, because the virgin Mary received the Holy Spirit and they definitely can be more Spirit-filled, however persona [?] as far as the clerical goes is male. So you cannot integrate the two. I will say that if it weren't for women, our churches wouldn't be filled (Mamales 1993).

Father Mamales continues by describing how women are utilized as Sunday School teachers, and in the Hellenic Ladies Association (a charity organization). Imagine the kind of message conveyed to families by the playing out of this theology of gender week after week during the most sacred ritual of the church. This exclusion of women undoubtedly has great impact on the role of women in the family. Leonel Mitchell points out the effect of a similar model on the systemic position of women:

> The visual impact of never seeing a woman preside at the Eucharist or having one read publicly from the Scripture or preach the Word seems to ritualize the exclusion of women from leadership functions in the Church and the "second class" position which, in spite of their frequent denials, both church and society assign them (Mitchell 1977, 130).

Other faith groups and individual congregations adhere to similar exclusionary practices regarding women, as in Illustration B. The Church often similarly excludes the young, the elderly, those of another race, or those belonging to particular economic brackets.

The Role of Children

In Father Mamaies' congregation, the children attend a portion of the worship service and even received Communion, but then were sent to "children's church" in another building. A separate experience for children is sometimes valuable since there is the opportunity to utilize symbols and a type of ritual which is meaningful for children. Children can also be taught the meaning of symbols which will become more familiar as they are integrated into adult worship. It is not healthy to expect children to perform adult roles. The Church, however, must be clear in its reasons for excluding children from various activities of the congregation. Congregations also need to explore ways of appropriately including children in congregational worship and other activities.

Many churches exclude children from one or both of the major sacraments or rites of the Christian Church--Baptism and Communion. These two rituals define membership and status in the family of God. The Greek Orthodox Church, which practices infant Baptism and even admits toddlers to the Communion table, often excludes and separates children from other parts of worship or church life. There are many protestant churches that do not practice infant Baptism or serve Communion to children. Pastor Prehn had some revealing comments concerning infant Communion:

What does it say to children when we invite

> everybody to come forward to take Communion --the children don't get it, but they're good enough to receive a blessing. Jesus said, "Take and eat." He didn't say "Take, understand and eat."
>
> We invite [children and infants] to the family table, but then we tell them they can't eat. "Come to the table now to have dinner, but we'll just say a few nice words to you and the rest of us will eat." What does that say to the psyche of children? If we exclude infants and children on the basis of understanding, what does it say about the rest of us? What does it say about mentally challenged people? We should then stop communing them (Prehn 1993)?

Westerhoff and Willimon agree that the Church needs to reexamine the exclusion of children:

> The involvement of children is a pressing need within many congregations where, even though children are baptized, they are excluded from the Lord's table. This makes no theological or historical sense. Baptized children are fully in the family and should fully participate in all of the family's gatherings--including the family's gathering for the Eucharist (Westerhoff and Willimon 1980, 51).

The Message to Families

The message is clear to families: the Church restricts certain members of the family system to particular roles. The other, perhaps even more destructive, message is that roles and rules are not flexible or adaptible: there is only one right way to interact within a system, and that way is carefully circumscribed. I propose that dogmatic exclusion by the Church encourages prejudice and rigidity within the family system. This rigid exclusive pattern is

placed under the umbrella of the holy, and reinforced through ritual.

In contrast, the pattern of worship leadership described in Illustration A affirms the leadership capabilities of age groups and of both genders. This model encourages the exchanging and sharing of roles. Citing Illustration A as a healthy model for inclusive worship does not imply that the leadership desires and capabilities of children and adults are identical. It is important, however, that the Church affirms all worshippers as human beings of equal worth before God, and in the family of God. Proclaiming this message of equal worth before God may mean that the pastor must modify the worship service to demonstrate that children also have something valuable to offer.

Inclusive Models

St. Paul's Lutheran in Durham, North Carolina, has a pattern of worship leadership similar to Illustration A. Because of the inclusive nature of its worship leadership, St. Paul's has no trouble obtaining a wide variety of volunteers to assist in worship. St. Paul's presently has a list of seventy-five lectors who have volunteered to read the lessons--more volunteers than there are Sundays in the year (Prehn 1993).

The synagogue worship at Judea Reform Congregation in Durham is also inclusive in its worship, according to the description of Rabbi Freidman:

> [If] you came here, I would be leading the worship, but there is someone who leads the musical portions, a cantor who is a lay-person; lay people will read and bless the Torah. There's a lot of participation. There is no distinction as to the role of the family except the person must be Jewish, and be over the age of thirteen, Bar or Bat Mitzvah to lead (Freidman 1993).

These inclusive models of worship encourage patterns of cooperation and flexibility in the family. Inclusive rituals in the family of God, and in a human family, encourage the extension of full membership and status to all members of the family. This inclusiveness not only empowers each member of the family system, but also increases the total power available to the family as a whole. The locus of power and leadership can shift to address different situations and changes in family composition.

Conclusion

Some important implications for the Church become obvious from this brief discussion about the interplay between the shape of the family and the shape of the Church. Worship leaders need to pay more attention to the symbols and symbolic actions of ritual which form subtle and powerful images for the family. Pastoral caregivers need to ask the right questions. What messages do the symbolic acts

and patterns of worship convey? Are these the intended messages? Do the patterns of interaction and distribution of power in the Church's ritual life portray healthy models for the family? Does the assignment of leadership roles for rituals carry the message that women, children, or other categories of persons are members of more limited status and worth? Pastors need to recognize and assess the messages which are being sent to families by the way in which the congregation conducts its rituals. Pastors must ensure that these rituals promote healing, celebrate a combination of stability and flexibility, encourage inclusiveness, and affirm families in the process of change and transition.

CONCLUSION

This discussion of the use of ritual in the pastoral care and support of families has intended to demonstrate the symbolic significance of ritual for the family, to describe the use of ritual in the assessing and healing of families who are in the midst of change, and to lift up the shape of the Church as a powerful model for the shape of the family.

The Church can no longer afford to ignore the importance and effect of ritual for the family. Joan Laird points out:

> Ritual . . . is one of the most powerful socialization mechanisms available. As we participate in the rituals of our society, our churches, or our families, we are socialized; we learn who we are and how we are to be (Laird 1990, 113).

I have asserted that the repetitive, symbolic, sacred natures of ritual endow it with this pervasive and enduring power. Inclusiveness and the prevention of family violence deserve special awareness and attention. Mitchell points to the importance of ritual for the discovery of meaning: "For us, as much as for primitive societies, it is a good ritual system which will enable us to find meaning in the universe and in our own lives" (Mitchell 1977, 14). Seubert adds that the use of ritual in the home deserve special attention: "Domestic rituals are so important because the home is the first and most constant place of our ritualizing" (Seubert 1993, 39). Because of their profound

effect on the family structure, pastors should exercise great sensitivity in creating and conducting rituals for the family and for public worship.

Clergymembers have an unequaled opportunity in regard to the support of families, since it is the unique perogative of clergy to visit people in their homes on a consistent basis. Families not only welcome the minister's visit but expect it. A pastoral visit is a great opportunity to make an impact on the shape of the family system through the use of ritual. The pastor who fails to use ritual for the support of families during home visits or in the conduct of public worship, is abandoning a rich treasure. Ralph Underwood is forceful in his condemnation of those ministers who neglect the use of ritual:

> [I] believe that there are designated means of grace that have been effective in the life of God's people. To overlook these means of grace--such as prayer, Scripture, and the sacraments--is not sensible in pastoral care ministry (Underwood 1993, 68).

The profound effects of ritual on the family system challenge us as ministers to rediscover the occasional services, prayer books, and books of blessings that are a part of the traditions of almost every denomination. Not content with only these printed resources, pastors ought to create an even more comprehensive reperatoire of rituals pertinent to their particular congregation. This collection can serve as a powerful reservoir of rituals to use in

addressing the array of blessings and challenges which families encounter.

Inescapably, rituals exert power, whether destructive or constructive, in the lives of families. In attending to this aspect of human life, pastors can use the power of ritual in constructive and redeeming ways--for encouragement, for support in times of change, for celebration, and for healing. Evan Imber-Black and Janine Roberts describe their experiences with the power of ritual:

> We found in our work that when people were given a framework to examine past and present rituals they often became makers of rich and significant rituals in their current lives. We found, too, that rituals provided a key to unlock confusing and painful family relationships and friendships. . . . And we watched, sometimes in awe, as people shaped and reshaped their rituals to make fundamental change in their lives (Imber-Black and Roberts 1992, xvi).

The worshipping community must recognize its own profound effect on the family through the words, structure, and symbols of its rituals.

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Richard Sipe, Jr. was born on February 13, 1949 in Newton, North Carolina and lived in Conover, North Carolina until 1971. He graduated from Newton-Conover High School in 1967. In the Spring of 1971, Chaplain Sipe received his Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology. He then attended Lutheran Theological Seminary (now Trinity Seminary) in Columbus, Ohio, earning a Master of Divinity with Honors in the Spring of 1975. On May 16, 1993, he received the Master of Theology degree in Pastoral Counseling from Duke Divinity School in Durham, North Carolina as part of a special postgraduate program sponsored by the Navy.

Before entering the Navy, Reverend Sipe served as a pastor of several different Lutheran (The American Lutheran Church which is now the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America). From 1976-1979, he served as pastor of Good Hope and St. Paul Lutheran Churches in Glenford, Ohio; from 1979-1981 as pastor of Bethel Lutheran Church in North East, Maryland; and from 1981-1986 as pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in East Rochester, New York. As a Navy Chaplain, Sipe served three years onboard the USS CONCORD, and then three years at the Naval Hospital in Naples, Italy. On June 1, 1993, he began a three-year tour of duty at Shepherd of the Sea Chapel at the Naval Submarine Base in Groton, Connecticut.

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